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THE IMMORTAL THOR

EWING
PINTI
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GRUNDETJERN
HOLLINGSWORTH

MARVEL

THE END OF ALL SONGS

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This prologue to the *G.O.D.S.* series, which ran in *Immortal Thor #1*, sets up one of the main narratives in this collection.

THE BOX.
YOUR NAME HAS ECHOED THROUGH THE AGES.
TYR ONE-HAND, THE VALOROUS AND POWERFUL. THE BLOODY NAME OF A WARRIOR VICTORIOUS.
BUT IT HAS TO GO, DOESN'T IT?
FOR THAT IS THE NAME THAT THEY CALL YOU IN THE WORLD OUT THERE.
AND WHAT DO WE THINK OF THAT WORLD?
IT IS A LIE.
YES. AND YOU DESERVE BETTER--YOU DESERVE THE REAL WORLD--AND THAT'S WHAT'S WAITING FOR YOU.
ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS GO IN.
WHAT IF I CARE NOT FOR IT?
CARE NOT FOR IT?
THIS IS YOUR NEW HOME.
I PROMISE. YOU WILL NOT LIKE IT, YOU WILL LOVE IT.

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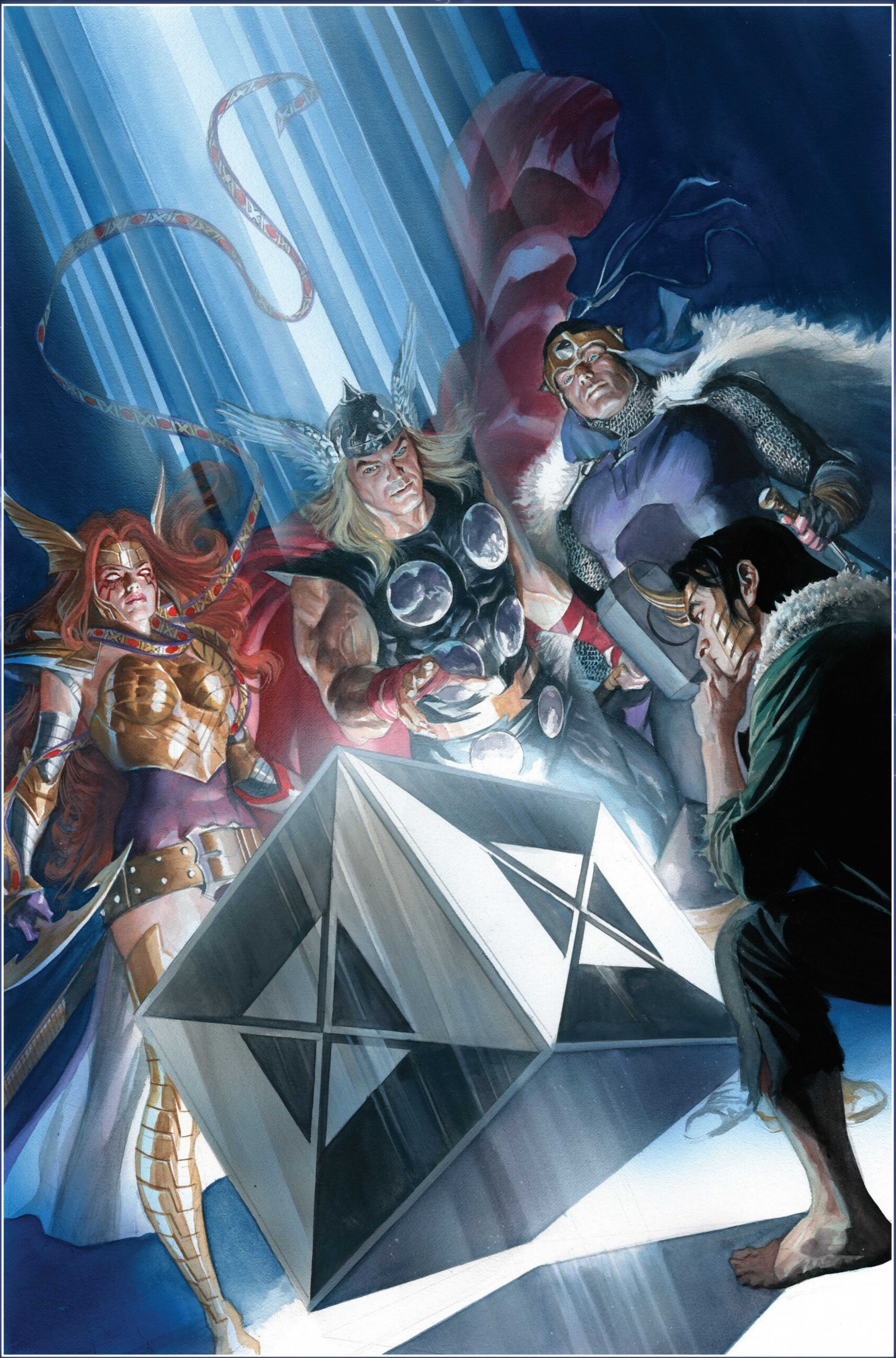
11



"FROM THAT TIME TYR HAS
HAD BUT ONE HAND.
HE IS NOT REGARDED AS A
PEACEMAKER AMONG MEN."

- "OF TYR,"
THE YOUNGER EDDAS OF SNORRE STURLESON

Far above Midgard, an Impossible City hung in the sky--home to Avengers.
IT DOESN'T LOOK GOOD, THOR.
I DON'T THINK THEY'LL PUT YOU IN CUFFS IF YOU SET FOOT ON EARTH AGAIN--WELL, NOT YET--
--BUT ONCE THE NEW YORK D.A.'S OFFICE GETS THEIR DUCKS IN A ROW, THAT COULD CHANGE.
FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, WE KNOW YOU DIDN'T KILL DARIO AGGER--OR THE KEEP. BUT EVEN SO, MAYBE IT'S BEST TO STICK WITH THE AVENGERS WHILE YOU'RE IN MIDGARD.
AGREED. FOR NOW.
THE SPELL THAT SLOWS MY THINKING IN THE MIDGARD-REALM IS...LESS POTENT WHEN I AM AROUND FRIENDS. THOSE WHO KNOW ME WELL, AND KNOW ME AS I AM...
YOU ARE A GOOD FRIEND, SAMUEL.
YOU ARE ALL GOOD FRIENDS TO ME.
YOU TOO, MAN. SORRY I DON'T HAVE BETTER NEWS ON THIS.
YOU'VE GOT PLENTY TO DO IN ASGARD, THOUGH, RIGHT...?
INDEED. WE WILL SPEAK ANON, CAPTAIN--BUT FOR NOW, THERE IS PRESSING BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO.
FAMILY BUSINESS.
BIP!
And so it was.

For All-Father Thor had called a meeting in Ullr's Hall, where the secret fire burned and where secrets were kept. A meeting of kin.
The Children of Odin.
First-born Angela, who was lost to the Realm of Heven in ages past and had grown strong and swift there.
Last-born Laussa, who would grow to legendary stature--but who was now a babe in the arms of swift Hermod, the laughing messenger.
There was Loki, in the aspect of the raggedy trickster, Thor's sometime-ally.
There was Balder the Brave, Odin's noblest son, proofed against all harm but mistletoe, his death once trigger to the Ragnarok.
There was Honir the Hunter, who kept to himself and the forest, and hunted wolf-lords under the moon.
And last to the hall came Vidar Giant's-Child, whose strength was as great as his solitude...
HURM.
WHAT BE THAT LITTLE BIT OF GLASS, BROTHER THOR?

'TIS CALLED A TELEPHONE, VIDAR. A SCRYING DEVICE FOR COMMUNICATION WITH THE MIDGARD-REALM...
MORTAL TOY, THEN.
THOUGHT YOU'D HAVE ENOUGH OF SUCH.
I AM OF MIDGARD AS MUCH AS ASGARD, BROTHER HONIR. THE MORTALS ARE MY FRIENDS...
...THOUGH I DO CONFESS THAT THEIR TOYS BEGIN TO IRK ME.
FLIMSY THINGS WITH A HEFTY COST, BUILT TO BREAK QUICKLY...
"THANKS FOR THE MAGIC CELL RECEPTION, LOKI."
"NO TROUBLE, THOR. NO NEED TO EVEN MENTION IT."
YOU SHOULD SPEND MORE TIME OFF-PLANET, THOR. THEY BUILD THINGS TO LAST OUT THERE...
OH, IT SOUNDS WONDERFUL, ANGELA! SO MUCH SPACE TO MOVE!
THEY EVEN CALL IT SPACE!
THE STARS ARE MORE A HOME TO ME NOW THAN THE REALMS ARE, HERMOD. SO IT GOES WHEN WE FLEE THE NEST...
OH, WE SHOULD GO! YOU WANT TO GO SEE THE TWINKLING STARS, LITTLE LAUSSA?
COOTCHIE COO! YES, YOU DO!
BUSINESS FIRST, BROTHER.

I WOULD LEARN WHY THE ALL-FATHER CALLED US HERE--TO THE FIRST MEETING OF ITS KIND IN CENTURIES.
A FAMILY MEETING OF THE ODINSPAWN...
THAT IS THE WHY OF IT, BALDER.
FOR THERE ARE STILL CHILDREN OF ODIN NOT IN THIS ROOM--
And that gave the All-Father cause to fear...for one was missing who did there belong.
So let us switch the mode from tale to song...to solve that puzzle.
KINFOLK!
WHAT...?
BRAGI'S HERE!

BROTHER BRAGI...?
Eh?
BRAGI... GOD OF POETRY...?
Bragi had been gone from Asgard since the Eighth Cosmos began.
And...I am the teller of this tale.
Bragi couldn't just take over--
AND YOU ARE LOKI-- LOKI STORY-SMITH, WHO TOOK MY PLACE AROUND THE TELLING-FIRE.
SO IT MUST GO--MY HAND HAD LEFT THE LYRE, AND STORIES NEED A HAND TO CONJURE WITH.
But age can oft outshine the fire of youth--so as I take a turn, I'll tell you why.
Each story told is woven as a lie...
...all poetry is spun to speak a truth.
...
I DON'T LIKE YOU.

I'M GLAD YOU'RE WITH US, BROTHER. IT'S BEEN TOO LONG.
AND YET COMPARED TO SOME, NOT LONG AT ALL.
I'M NOT THE ONLY EXILE WITH DESIRE TO LOOK ONCE MORE UPON THE ANCIENT FIRE...
...I SHARE THAT WITH THE GOD WHO BUILT THIS HALL.
WHAT?
What words could make the Aesir catch their breath?
An invocation of a god forgot--Thor's truest kin, but all that Thor was not.
No hero...
...but a god of doom and death.
YOU CALLED FOR THE CHILDREN OF ODIN, THOR.
AND YET, THOUGH YOU HOLD YOUR CONGRESS AROUND MY OWN FIRE AND UNDER MY OWN ROOF...

...YOU CALLED NOT FOR **ULLR**.
I HAVE BEEN GONE FROM ASGARD A LONG TIME. A **LONG** TIME. BUT HAVE I BEEN GONE SO LONG AS **THAT**, BROTHER?
AM I SO EASY **UNREMEMBERED?**
AM I SO GREATLY FEARED?

BRAGI! YOU BROUGHT HIM HERE? YOU INVITED HIM BACK?
ARE YOU QUITE MAD?
YOU FEAR HIM, LAD?
I HAVE A GREATER FEAR--OF ODIN'S CHILDREN USED FOR EVIL'S WORK.
IF EVEN LONG-LOST ULLR WOULD NOT SHIRK THIS MEETING, TELL ME...
...WHAT'S BECOME OF TYR?
AYE. OUR BROTHER--THE GOD OF WAR--IS MISSING.
AND AS BRAGI IMPLIES IN HIS FINE VERSE, TO BE GONE SO LONG IS MORE UNUSUAL FOR HIM THAN FOR ULLR THE WANDERER.
AND THUS--GIVEN TYR'S OFT-DISPLAYED ABILITY TO MAKE US TROUBLE--I WOULD SEEK HIM OUT.

SIF HAS NOT SPIED HIM?
TYR'S IN NO PLACE SHE CAN SEE, THOUGH HER GAZE NOW REACHES TO THE FARTHEST STAR.
MY RAVENS HAVE FOUND NO SIGN EITHER, THOUGH THEY SEARCH THE REALMS HIGH AND LOW. TYR IS GONE, AND I KNOW NOT WHERE...
...BUT YOU DO, ULLR.
DON'T YOU?
THE LORD OF THE YEW CHOOSES NOW TO ATTEND A GATHERING OF ODIN'S CHILDREN? AT THE BEHEST OF HE WHO WAS ONCE SKALD OF ASGARD?
THERE IS MORE HERE THAN I KNOW-- AND I WOULD KNOW IT.
WOULD YOU? WOULD YOU KNOW AS I KNOW, BROTHER ALL-FATHER?
THEN YOU MUST WALK UPON MY ROAD, AND IN MY STEPS.
YOU MUST WALK INTO THE FIRE.

um.
SHOULD I HAVE LEFT THE BABY SOMEWHERE?
MAKES NO DIFFERENCE, HERMOD THE SWIFT.
IF WE FAIL, SHE'LL DIE WITH A NURSE AS EASY AS IN YOUR ARMS.
LAUSSA'S A CHILD OF ODIN, HERMOD--AND MUCH MORE THAN SHE SEEMS.
I'LL ATTEST TO THAT AS WELL. IF ANY AESIR'S SAFE, IT'S HER...
YOU SPEAK TRUE, BALDER.
IF.
Aye, "if"--a tricksy word.
For "if" can mean so many varied outcomes to the game. We cast our dice and wager all the same--but do we win?
Or lose?
WE'RE HERE.

Or In-Between?
HUM.
BOXES.

A GREAT MANY BOXES.
TYR'S IN ONE OF *THESE*, IS HE?
'TIS *SURELY* MORE PROFOUND THAN *THAT*--
NO. TYR WENT IN A BOX, AND A BOX IS A *BOX*. IT'S WHO *BUILT* THE BOX.
TELL THEM, BRAGI. YOU TELL IT ALL *BETTER*...
AHEM.
THE COSMOS *CHANGED*, FROM SEVEN INTO *EIGHT*-- FROM ODD TO *EVEN*, POETRY TO *PROSE*.
THIS *NEW* REALITY, A *SCIENTIST* CHOSE-- SO THERE'S A *SYSTEM* TO THE WEAVE OF FATE, A HIERARCHY BROKEN INTO *TWOS*.
THE MAGIC FIGHTS THE *SCIENCE*, TIME FIGHTS *SPACE*, OBLIVION'S AGAINST THE TRIPLE FACE OF *JUDGMENT*. (WHO WE HOPE CAN NEVER LOSE.)
SO THESE *VAST FORCES*-- TO WHOM EVEN *WE*, THE *GODS OF ASGARD*, ARE BUT MORTAL *ANTS*--
--MUST WORK TOGETHER THROUGH THEIR *SYCOPHANTS*, THROUGH *INTERMEDIARIES* WE CAN *SEE*.
THE ONE WHO ACTS AND SPEAKS UPON THE WHIM OF *ORDER* AND OF *CHAOS* HAS A NAME THAT'S GAINED, FOR THOSE WHO *KNOW*, A CERTAIN *FAME*:
THE IN-BETWEENER.

THESE BELONG TO HIM.
I COULD HAVE SAID ALL THAT IN HALF THE TIME--WITHOUT THE RHYME.
BUT YOU DID NOT.
YOU HAVEN'T MADE A PEEP SINCE THOR TOLD US THE PURPOSE OF THIS QUEST.
WHAT CARDS ARE HELD SO CLOSELY TO YOUR CHEST?
WHAT SECRETS DOES THE STORYTELLER KEEP?
...
FINE. CONFESSION TIME. I MIGHT--AND I STRESS THE WORD MIGHT--
--BUT I MIGHT, POSSIBLY, PERHAPS, HAVE KINDA-SORTA-MAYBE...
...FED TYR TO THE IN-BETWEENER.
LOKI!

WHAT, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE?
EH?
WHEN WAS THIS...?
The question isn't when, but rather why.
RIGHT AFTER BETRAYING ASGARD, HE SELLS OUT TO THE RØKKVA, OUR OWN LITTLE PIECE OF THE ANTI-ALL.
SO I SWEPT IN AND PUT HIM IN MAGIC PRISON. NO NEED TO THANK ME.
For Tyr knew secrets Loki wished to learn-- and Loki kept him secret in return...
...to learn the trick of how a God must die.
DO YOU MIND?
DO I MIND WHAT? LOKI, SPEAK PLAIN--
THE POINT IS-- HE GOT BROKEN OUT PRETTY MUCH IMMEDIATELY. NEXT THING WE KNOW, HE'S TEAMED UP WITH DREAMQUEEN AND ARES OF ALL PEOPLE.
SO THIS TIME, WHEN I SAW A BETTER BOX--A BETTER CELL--I PUSHED HIM INTO IT.
PULL HIM OUT IF YOU LIKE, BUT DON'T BLAME ME WHEN HE GOES WRONG AGAIN--

BUT HE **HAS** GONE WRONG.
EEP!
WRONG AND WRONGER. **DARK AND DARKER.** AND **YOU** ARE TO BLAME.
I CARE NOT **WHAT** SECRETS YOU WISH TO KEEP, TALE-TELLER. BUT THE BOXES ARE NOT **ONLY** BOXES.
THEY TEACH THE WAYS OF **OBLIVION...**
...AND NOW THEY TEACH A GOD OF WAR.
I AM THE **LORD OF THE YEW,** GOD OF **DARK DOOMS.** I KNOW THEIR COMING **WELL.**
WE SHOULD HURRY.
AYE. WE'LL SPEAK OF THIS **LATER,** LOKI.
FOR **NOW,** WE MUST FIND OUR WAYWARD **NEEDLE** IN THIS HAYSTACK...
ANGELA, HONIR--YOU ARE OUR **HUNTERS.** CAN YOU TURN YOUR SKILLS TO A PLACE SUCH AS **THIS?**
THE ANGELS OF HEVEN CAN TRACK THEIR PREY ACROSS **DIMENSIONS,** THOR. SUCH A KNACK IS **NEVER LOST...**
...BUT **TYR** MIGHT BE. THE SCENT-TRACE... IT'S NOT QUITE **HIM.**
I THINK WE'RE TOO LATE.

HONIR? WHAT SAY YOU, QUIET ONE?
SNFF SNFF
TWO TRACKS, RECKON I.
CLOSE AND FAR...
TYR'S TO BE FOUND IN TWO DIRECTIONS? HOW CAN THAT BE?
CAN YOU, AH...ELABORATE FOR US, BROTHER...?
NAY.
IT TALLIES WITH WHAT I SENSE. TYR IS SPLIT, SOMEHOW. IN TWO PLACES...
ONE NEAR, ONE FAR. WE ARE INTRUDERS IN THIS WORLD--THE FARTHEST DISTANCE WILL BE THE GREATEST DANGER. I CLAIM THAT.
LOKI, ANGELA, BRAVE BALDER--IF YOU WOULD JOIN ME, I WOULD HAVE YOU AT MY SIDE.

BRAGI--YOU AND LOKI ARE BOTH SKALDS. CAN YOU SPEAK TO EACH OTHER THROUGH THAT MAGIC...?
UNFORTUNATELY...
OUR SIBLING SPEAKS IT BRIEF, I'LL SPEAK IT LONG--THEY HEAR MY TALE, I CAN IN TURN HEAR THEIRS.
AND THAT IS TRUE DESPITE ALL HOWS AND WHERES--FOR THAT'S THE STORY'S KINSHIP WITH THE SONG.
NOBODY'S IMPRESSED, YOU KNOW.
IT'S BASICALLY DOGGEREL.
ENOUGH.
TYR AND THE RØKKVA MADE A DEADLY PAIR--I DARE NOT IMAGINE WHAT ALLIANCE HE MIGHT MAKE WITH OBLIVION.
WE MUST MAKE HASTE.
I'D WONDER IF THEY HAD THE HARDER TASK--IF THERE WAS DEEPER DANGER TO FORESEE UPON THEIR PATH.
BUT YOU'VE REMAINED WITH ME.
SO REALLY, BROTHER...DO I NEED TO ASK?
YOU DO NOT. I GO TO MEET DOOM, BRAGI.
DOOM AND A TRUE DEATH.

THIS ONE.
YOU'LL NOT FIT IN THERE, VIDAR. HERE--TAKE LAUSSA.
NOT TO SAY WE HAVE THREE LIARS IN THE FAMILY, BUT I'M NOT SO CONFIDENT THAT A TODDLER CAN HOLD HER OWN AGAINST A COSMIC ASPECT.
BEST SHE STAYS WITH THE MOST POWERFUL OF US...
...WHILE I SCOUT AHEAD!
SWISH
HEY!
WAIT FOR THE OTHERS!
HMM. BIGGER ON THE INSIDE.
STILL, TYR SHOULD BE EASY TO SPOT. I DOUBT HE'S CHANGED ALL THAT...
...OH.
TYR...

...WHOSE *HAND* IS THAT?

GOD OF DOOM

12

“TACITURN AND PRUDENT, AND IN WAR DARING, SHOULD A KING’S CHILDREN BE; JOYOUS AND LIBERAL EVERY ONE SHOULD BE UNTIL HIS HOUR OF DEATH.”

– “THE HIGH ONE’S LAY,”
THE ELDER EDDAS OF SAEMUND SIGFUSSON

Once upon a time... there was a box.
One of many set by the In-Betweener--to trap those receptive to the teachings of Oblivion, and to teach Oblivion's lessons.
WHUDD
Tyr, God of War, had become one such pupil. And though he was a fallen god--(or was he pushed?)--he was still a son of Odin.
And the other children of Odin would not let him fall easily to such cosmic machinations.
WHAAMM
Though the trail to him split in two, still they would follow it both ways...
HERE!
AN OPENING--LEADING TO...
...however far it led them.
...TO...
OD'S BLOOD.

And this was far *indeed.*
WHAT *IS* THIS PLACE...?
IT HAS THE FROSTY AIR OF *JOTUNHEIM*--YET JOTUNHEIM NEVER OFFERED SUCH A *SKY.*
ANGELA? IS THIS WHERE THE TRAIL TO OUR BROTHER *ENDS?*
ONE OF THE TRAILS DOES...
...WHICH MEANS AT LEAST A *PART* OF TYR IS HERE TO BE FOUND.
THOUGH *WHICH* PART--OR EVEN WHERE *"HERE" IS*--I COULDN'T TELL YOU YET.
IT IS MY *HOME.*

OR AT LEAST, IT'S WHERE I CHOOSE TO **WANDER** FOR A TIME.
LOOK THOU FOR **THIS**, MY FRIENDS?
Strange **indeed** was the visitor. And stranger still his **arrival**, between one eyeblink and the next.
Yet strangest of all was the **blazing rune** that flitted around his hand, as if the fiery sigil were a **bird** that wished to feed from his palm.
The rune of **Tyr**... that was also rune of **Tiwaz**.
TIWAZ?
IS IT TRULY **YOU**...?
The rune of **justice and sacrifice**.

And sacrifice there was.
TYR?
TYR, ANSWER ME.
ARE-- ARE YOU ALL RIGHT...?
NOTHING IS ALL RIGHT.
NOTHING IS GOOD.
PRAISE NOTHING.
For Tyr was found.

Swift Hermod knew not how to best **respond...**
TYR-- I--
I DON'T-- I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO--
I'LL GET **HELP--**
...to what was now no **God...**
RUN AND GET **HELP,** THEN.
NOTHING IS QUICKER THAN HERMOD.
...but far beyond.
NOTHING.
IS **QUICKER.**
So Hermod met his end without a sound.

Outside, the **other** Odin-Children peered into the darkness, calling Hermod's name.
HERMOD? HELLO?
But every time, the answer was the **same--a silence...**
...that confirmed what Honir **feared.**
HE'S GONE.
EH? GONE **WHERE,** HONIR?
GONE, VIDAR. NO SCENT. NO **NOWT. GONE.**
BUT...GONE **WHERE...?**
OUR BROTHER IS A GOD UNUSED TO SPEECH.
SO **I** WILL TELL IT, PLAINLY AS I MAY: POOR HERMOD IS A PIECE **REMOVED FROM PLAY...** FROM **LIFE...**
...AND EVEN FROM VALHALLA'S REACH.
BRAGI SPEAKS TRUE.
WHAT OBLIVION'S OWN HAND TOUCHES KNOWS **NO CONTINUATION.** THE DOOM **BEYOND** MERE DEATH.
TODAY, AN ODINSON MET HIS **END.**

AYE. I SEE NOW, ULLR--GONE IS MORE THAN DEAD. NO VALHALLA, NOR EVEN CHEERLESS HEL.
I'VE KNOWN GREAT GRIEFS IN MY YEARS, BROTHERS. YET THIS IS A GRIEF THAT'S LIKE NO OTHER...
...AND WAKES IN ME THE NEED FOR A VENGEANCE LIKE NO OTHER.
WHO WILL HOLD THE CHILD?
I WILL.
I'LL HOLD LITTLE LAUSSA. AND THEN I'LL HOLD MY BROTHERS AND MY OTHER SISTER... UNTIL MY HAND IS QUITE EMPTY...
AND THEN?
THEN I'LL HOLD THE WORLD TREE ITSELF.
AND SEE WHAT COMES OF THAT.
'Tis said the eyes are windows to the soul. And yet in those eyes, nothing could be seen.

Oblivion stood now where Tyr had been.
What magic rune could make the war-god whole?
UH-OH.
UPDATE FROM BRAGI, FOLKS.
TYR'S BECOME A VESSEL FOR OBLIVION--HE'S PLANNING TO WIPE OUT YGGDRASIL THE WORLD TREE, AND EVERYTHING WITH IT.
RUNE-MAGIC MIGHT CURE HIM, BUT...THERE'S WORSE NEWS.
HERMOD WAS TOUCHED BY OBLIVION'S HAND. HE'S BEEN REMOVED FROM EXISTENCE.
WHAT...?
SWIFT HERMOD, FALLEN TO THE TRUE DEATH...?
TYR IS WHERE HE IS AND WHAT HE IS FROM YOUR ACTIONS, LOKI--AND WE SEE NOW THEIR CONSEQUENCES.
WERE I YOU, I WOULD PRAY TO FATHER ODIN THAT NO MORE OF US FALL...
ODIN? AND WHAT CAN ODIN DO, DEAD IN VALHALLA? I THOUGHT YOU WERE ALL-FATHER, THOR.
ARE YOU NOT THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY?
OR IS THERE ONE GREATER?

WHO *IS* THIS, THOR? BEFORE, YOU ACTED AS IF YOU *KNEW* HIM...
HIS NAME IS *TIWAZ*--A WIZARD OF MY ACQUAINTANCE. HE TENDED TO ME ONCE WHEN I WAS *LOST*--IN HIS DOMAIN, AND IN *GRIEF.*
YET HIS PRESENCE *HERE* SUGGESTS THERE WAS *MORE* TO THAT TALE...
AYE, TIWAZ AM I *CALLED*--TIWAZ WHO *WANDERS*, TIWAZ WHO IS *WISDOM* AND THE *WINTER SKY.*
AND TIWAZ WAS I CALLED WHEN THE *DEMIURGE* WOKE ME TO *BEING*. WHEN I FACED GREAT *ATUM*--*WON* WITH *WILE AND WIT*--AND WENT MY WAY.
TIWAZ WAS I CALLED WHEN I WANDERED HERE TO *ANDLANG*--THE *MIDDLE-HEAVEN*, LAND OF *SPIRITS* AND *STRANGE FORCES.*
TIWAZ WAS I CALLED WHEN I STOOD *TOO LONG* HERE, LOST IN *WONDER* AT THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF WORLDS AND TIME...AND THICK *RIME-ICE* CREPT OVER ME.
BUT WHEN *AUDUMBLA*--THE COW WHOSE MILK NOURISHED *YMIR* THE *PRIMAL GIANT*--LICKED ME *FREE*...I TOOK *ANOTHER* NAME.
THEN WAS I CALLED *BURI ALL-FATHER.*
FOR I WAS FATHER TO *BOR*...WHO THEN WAS FATHER TO *ODIN*...
...WHO WAS FATHER TO *THOR*, WHO STANDS WITH MOUTH AGAPE BEFORE ME NOW.
MY *GREAT-GRANDSON.*

THEN 'TIS A FORTUITOUS MEETING INDEED! YOU ARE GREAT-GRANDSIRE TO ALL ON THIS QUEST--AND TYR AS WELL!
YOU COULD END HIS MADNESS--WHY, YOU HOLD THE RUNE OF HIS BEING IN THY VERY HAND--
BALDER. DO NOT COUNT CHICKENS.
BURI IS OUR KIN...
...BUT TIWAZ IS WISDOM--AND I'VE YET TO MEET ANY WISDOM THAT LENDS ITSELF TO EASY ANSWERS.
YET YOU HAVE MET WISDOM, GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER--AND CLEARLY HAVE SOME WITH YOU STILL.
AYE, BALDER. THIS IS THE RUNE OF TYR'S SPIRIT--AND TO RESTORE IT TO HIM IS TO RESTORE HIM.
BUT IT IS MY RUNE ALSO, AND I AM LOATH TO LET IT GO...
YOU SPEAK IN RIDDLES, OLD ONE.
AM I NOT GREAT-GRANDSIRE TO LOKI AS WELL? ARE RIDDLES NOT AS FINE A SPORT AS ANY AND RUNE-RIDDLES AS VALID A TEST?
THEN HERE IS MY TEST, THOR ALL-FATHER. THE RUNE TIWAZ IS RUNE OF VICTORY.
SO YOU ALONE MUST WIN IT FROM ME.
Such was the challenge.

To win the **spirit-rune** that would restore the **true** Tyr...
In *LOKI'S* TALE, TYR'S SPIRIT HAS BEEN CAST IN *RUNIC FORM.*
THAT MAY *RESTORE* OUR KIN--IF *THOR* CAN BRING IT TO OUR SIDE WITHIN...
...HOWEVER LONG A TIME WE HAVE TO *LAST.*
WEREN'T YOU *LISTENING*, VIDAR? YOU BIG, STUPID *OAF?*
I SAID--
--I WANT TO HOLD MY SISTER!
VIDAR--
Had Vidar in that moment sought to **shield** himself with Laussa, he would here be **shamed**.
But Laussa was not **offered**...

...she was **aimed.**
BA!
AAHHHRR!
And **Surtur's fire** can cause a **god** to yield.
GAA!
THERE'S A SWEET GIRL.
WHEN YOU'RE **READY**, HONIR.
READY.
Honir the hunter's arrows fell like **hail**, a **thunderstorm** to drive the war-god back.

Elsewhere, another thunderous attack struck Buri square and true...
FALL, GREAT-GRANDFATHER!
KRAKOOOMMM
...only to fail.
I CHOOSE NOT TO FALL.
WHAT NOW, THOR?
I HAVE STRONGER WEAPONS THAN THE LIGHTNING, OLD WIZARD! AS MJOLNIR WILL ATTEST!
FLY TRUE, MY HAMMER! RING HIS SKULL AS YOU WOULD A BELL--TO SOUND THE VICTORY!

AH, **MJOLNIR!**
STOP **THERE**, PLEASE. I WOULD ADMIRE THY **CRAFTSMANSHIP.**
YOU ARE TRULY EITRI'S **GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT**, OLD FRIEND. 'TIS GOOD TO SEE YOU **WHOLE** AGAIN.
STILL, THIS IS AS CLOSE AS I'D **PREFER** YOU, GREAT CRUSHER...
...SO BACK TO YOUR MASTER'S HAND YOU GO.
WHAT **NOW**, THOR?
THOR, WE DO NOT HAVE **TIME** FOR--
THAP
I **KNOW**, SISTER.
LET ME **THINK**.
AYE-- LET ME **THINK**.
BURI CHALLENGED ME TO **WIN** AGAINST HIM--AND CLAIMED HE WON A BATTLE WITH **ATUM HIMSELF**, IN THE PRIMAL TIME.
IF HE SURVIVED THE COSMIC FIRE OF **GAEA'S FIRSTBORN**, HE'LL IGNORE ANY BLOW **I** GIVE HIM. EVEN THE **ODIN-POWER** IS LIKELY USELESS AGAINST ODIN'S OWN **GRANDFATHER**.
YET HE **ALSO** SAID THAT HE WON THAT BATTLE BY HIS **WILE** AND WITH HIS **WIT**...

...AND THAT RIDDLES ARE AS FINE A CONTEST AS ANY.
LET US WAGER ON THY WITS, TIWAZ. ANSWER ME THIS, IF YOU CAN--AND IF YOU CAN, THE RUNE IS YOURS.
WHAT IS BIG, RED AND EATS ROCKS?
A RIDDLE! LET ME CONSIDER, THEN.
IS IT SURTUR, PERHAPS, WHOSE FLAME YOUNG LAUSSA WIELDS? HE IS BIG AND RED, AND HIS FIRE CONSUMES ALL, EVEN STONE...
NAY. THE FIRE CONSUMES-- BUT NOT SURTUR HIMSELF.
THEN 'TIS THE SUN FROM WHICH ATUM CAME.
FOR IT WILL ONE DAY TURN BIG AND RED, AND SWALLOW THE ROCK THAT IS EARTH--
NAY. I ASKED NOT WHAT WILL BE, BUT WHAT IS.
HMM! THEN YOU HAVE ME, THOR. I AM WITHOUT AN ANSWER.
WHAT IS BIG, RED AND EATS ROCKS?
A BIG RED ROCK-EATER.
And Tiwaz laughed, rich and deep...

...and when the laughter was **done**, the rune was in Thor's own hand.
WELL DONE. YOU HAVE YOUR **PRIZE**, THOR.
BUT **TELL** ME, BEFORE I SEND YOU HENCE--WHERE **LEARNED** YOU THAT JEST?
AT MY **FATHER'S KNEE**. 'TWAS A FAVORITE OF HIS.
IS THAT **SO?** I WONDER WHOSE KNEE **HE** LEARNED IT AT.
BE ABOUT YOUR **QUEST**, MY GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN--OH, AND **LOKI?**
UH... **YES**...?
I KNOW WHAT YOU'VE **DONE**--AND WHAT YOU **WILL** DO.
YOU, I'LL SEE AGAIN.
WHAT MEANT HE BY **THAT**...?
I **DON'T KNOW**. I SWEAR ON ODIN'S **GRAVE-DIRT**, BROTHER--I HAVE **NO IDEA**.
Not a **word**, Bragi.
...
FATHER WAS CREMATED IN A LONGBOAT.
Not a word.

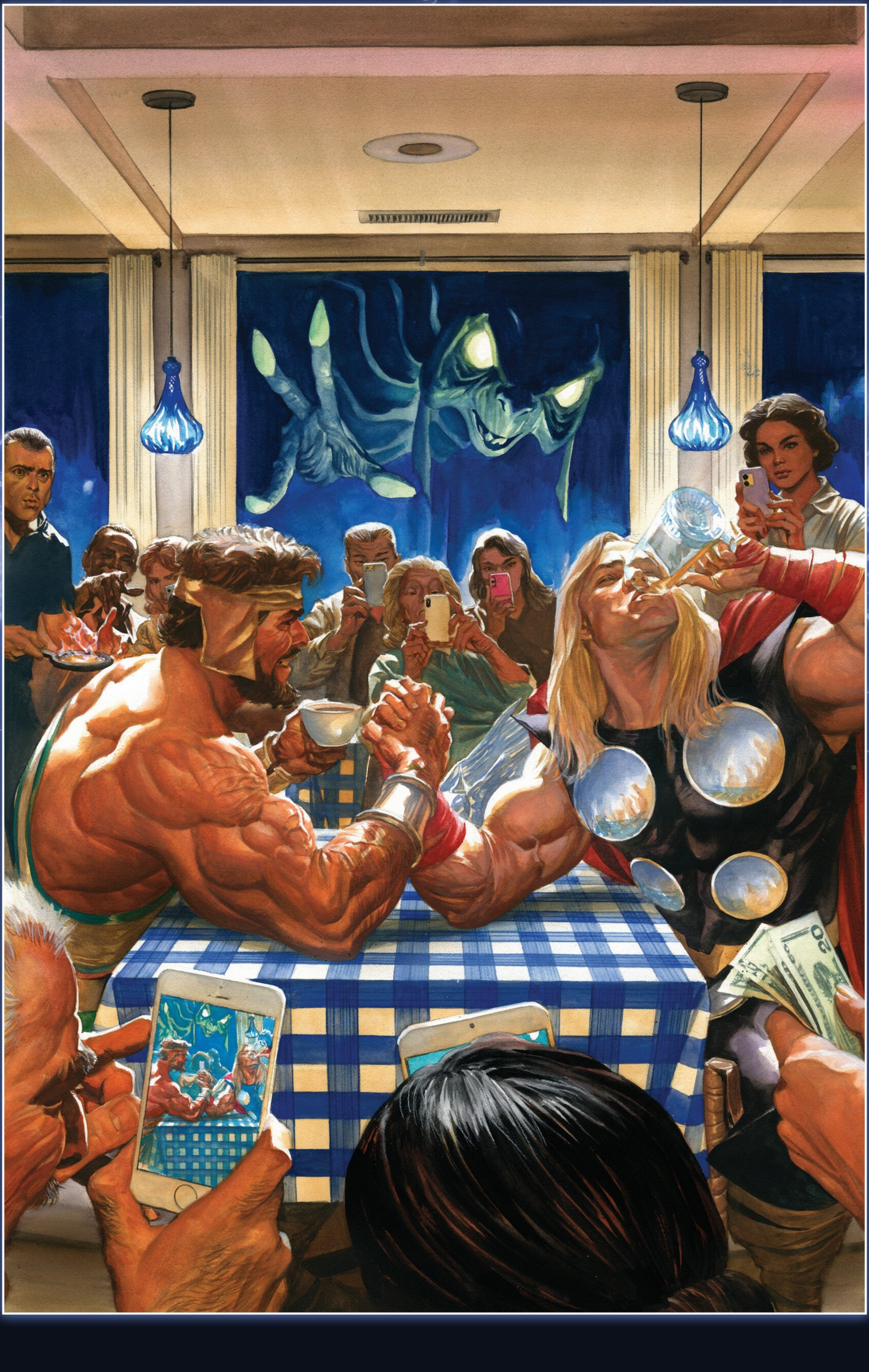
A closer threat than any trickster's goal was readying itself.
BROTHER.
MY ARM'S TIRED.
SO'S YOUR SISTER! FALL BACK, BEFORE--
"Too late" was soon--
--but not just yet.
OBLIVION!
THANK BURI FOR THAT.
YOU HAVE SQUATTED IN MY BROTHER'S BODY TOO LONG.
I CARE NOT HOW VAST A CONCEPT YOU ARE, NOR HOW LONG YOU HAVE LAID YOUR PLANS--
--'TIS TIME TO GIVE HIM BACK!
CAST YOUR PETTY SIGIL, THOR. OBLIVION HAS ALL THE TIME THERE IS.
SHALL I TELL YOU WHAT FINAL DOOM WAITS FOR YOU...?
IF YOU WISH...
...YOU MAY SCREAM IT.
For downward fell the rune...

...that was the missing portion of Tyr's soul.
The emptiness in him was filled--with pain. Tyr screamed...
...and then his scream took on a shape.
The Serpent of the End made his escape.
If something's there, nothing cannot remain.
TYR'S HIMSELF AGAIN...

...WORSE LUCK.
QUIET, LOKI. I HAVE VERY LITTLE DESIRE TO HEAR FROM YOU--
FORGIVE OUR SIBLING, THOR. THEY ONLY TELL THEIR TALE AS TELLERS MUST--TO MEET THE TIMES.
ALL I SEE IS THE SAME OLD MISCHIEF. PERHAPS YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED THE SKALD, BRAGI...
NOT I. REALITY NO LONGER RHYMES--IT NEEDS A TRICKSTER'S TONGUE TO SING IT WELL.
...
THANKS.
AND YOU, ULLR? YOUR HALL IS YOURS AGAIN, SHOULD YOU WISH IT...
YOU ARE GRACIOUS, ALL-FATHER. FEW WOULD WISH THE GOD OF DOOM TO SHARE THEIR KINGDOM.
BUT THEN, YOU ALREADY HAVE A DARK FATE OVER YOU...
...
ULLR, YOU ARE MY OLDER BROTHER. AND CLOSER KIN BY BLOOD THAN ANY I HAVE.
IF THERE ARE THINGS YOU KNOW...I WOULD HAVE YOU TELL THEM.
THEN TELL THEM I SHALL.
FOR AS SURELY AS I AM THY MOTHER'S CHILD...

...THY END IS *COMING*, THOR.
AND IT COMES *SOON*.
THE END OF ALL SONGS

13



"NOTT IT IS CALLED BY MEN, BUT BY THE GODS NIOL; THE WIDE-RULING POWERS CALL IT GRIMA, THE JOTUNS OLIOS, THE ALFAR SVEFNGAMAN; THE DWARFS CALL IT DRAUMNIORUNN."

- "THE LAY OF THE DWARF ALVIS,"
THE ELDER EDDAS OF SAEMUND SIGFUSSON

The night has many names.
And her reach is **long**.
Even in the midst of a sunny day, the darkness waits--that cannot be **put off**, nor **turned back**...
So it was then on **Midgard**, among the islands of Greece.
The noon sun shone bright upon Thor the Thunderer, yet a **dark night** loomed over him. For Midgard was no longer a welcoming home to the son of Gaea.
The Enchantress and the Executioner had murdered a foe of Thor's and incriminated him for the deed, in a scheme to steal the very thread of his fate.
Thus, to show his face in **America** was--at least potentially--to bring **mortal law** down upon his head.
But that was not the only land where Thor had **allies**...
LOW KEY
THOR!
IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU!

...as close to him as brothers.
I'M JUST SORRY THE PLACE IS SUCH A MESS.
AYE--I REMEMBER THE SANCTUARY OF HERCULES WHEN IT WAS STILL STANDING. 'TWAS QUITE THE PARTY PALACE...
A COUPLE OF EARTHQUAKES AGO, MAYBE. BUT IT WAS BUILT FOR A GOOD TIME, NOT A LONG TIME--AT LEAST BY OUR STANDARDS.
HOW ARE YOU, MY FRIEND?
UNDER SUSPICION OF MURDER. AND I HAVE MORE TROUBLES BESIDES.
MY FOES USED SKALD-MAGIC TO WEAVE AN ENCHANTMENT ABOUT ME--SO THAT ON MIDGARD, MY THINKING SLOWS. I...BECOME FOOLISH.
I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO MANAGE THAT.
AH! SO YOU NEED THE STOUT ADVICE OF HERCULES!
WHO BETTER TO TEACH HOW TO BE A FOOL?

I--I MEAN NO *INSULT*, MY FRIEND. I DID NOT THINK OF HOW THAT WOULD *SOUND.*
I DID NOT THINK.
I'M *JOKING*, THOR!
YOU SHOULD *KNOW* THAT!
I'VE BEEN *VERY* FOOLISH. SOMETIMES, I AM *STILL* VERY FOOLISH.
IF I'VE FOUND SOME *WISDOM* NOW, IT'S NOT THROUGH *DENYING WHO I AM.*
THE *PROBLEM* IS THAT THIS IS *NOT* WHO I AM...
MY POINT *EXACTLY!* THIS TALK OF *"MANAGING"* THE SPELL ON YOU-- THAT'S THE *SPELL* TALKING!
THE GOD OF THUNDER *I* KNOW WOULD LOOK TO *BREAKING* IT!
YOU SPEAK *TRUE*, HERCULES-- BUT ENOUGH OF MY TROUBLES. I DID NOT COME BECAUSE *I* NEEDED HELP.
YOU CALLED ON ME FOR THE *FAVOR* I OWED THEE, AFTER THY HELP AGAINST THE *GIANT-SIZE THOR*-- HOW MAY I ASSIST THEE?
'TIS *GODLY BUSINESS*, THOR. *OLYMPIAN* BUSINESS.
AND *YOUR* BUSINESS TOO, I FEAR.
I SAW *NEWS FOOTAGE* OF YOUR FIGHT WITH *TORANOS* IN NEW YORK--AND ABOVE HIS *THUNDER*, I HEARD HIS *WORDS.*
"THE WHEEL HAS TURNED."

AYE.
I WELL REMEMBER THEM.
AS DO *I*. FOR I HAVE HEARD THE WORDS *BEFORE*--FROM MY *OWN FATHER*. THE MAD *ZEUS*, REBORN FROM DEATH AS A FORCE OF *EVIL*.
HE SPOKE OF A WHEEL THAT TURNED. OF A DARK AGE NOW *UPON* US...
A DARK AGE.
IT SOUNDS SIMILAR TO WHAT MY MOTHER *GAEA* SAID--ABOUT A TIME OF *TRIAL* UPON THE EARTH.
I *APOLOGIZE*, HERCULES. THE NEWS OF THY FATHER'S DEATH *REACHED* ME, BUT...
'TWAS NOT AN *IDLE TIME* FOR YOU. I UNDERSTAND.
I COULD SAY THE SAME ABOUT *ODIN*. I'M SORRY I WASN'T AT THE *FUNERAL*--BUT THE GALAXY IS AN *EVENTFUL PLACE*, AND NOT ALL NEWS TRAVELS.
PERHAPS WE CAN MAKE IT UP TO ONE ANOTHER NOW.
FOR IF THE WHEEL *TURNED*, THOR--*WHO TURNED IT?*
WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF *NYX?*

THE GODDESS OF NIGHT.
ASGARD KNOWS OF HER-- THE TALES TELL OF NOTT, THE UN-LIGHT. THE MORTALS BELIEVED HER BORN TO GIANTS... BUT SHE EMERGED FROM THE VOID ITSELF.
MY FATHER GIFTED HER A HORSE, ONCE...
MY FATHER GIFTED HER A PLACE IN OUR PANTHEON. SHE BORE HER CHILDREN ON OLYMPUS--AND BORE HER GRIEVANCES THERE TOO.
ZEUS EXILED HER FOR WARRING AGAINST HIM--BUT THEN NIGHT FELL ON THE WHOLE WORLD, AND THAT GAVE HER POWER TO RETURN.
AND WHEN SHE DID, SHE MURDERED HIM IN HER REVENGE...
BUT THE AVENGERS DEFEATED HER. INDEED, THE VISION USED THE VERY FORCES OF CREATION TO--
TO BANISH HER. TO EXILE HER.
TELL ME, THOR...
...HOW MANY TIMES HAS NIGHT FALLEN ON THE WHOLE WORLD SINCE THEN?
THE BLOOD HUNT. AND BEFORE THAT, THE KING IN BLACK. AYE, I SEE THY MEANING.
WE WILL NEED HELP.
If Nyx had returned, then magic was needed in the fight. Even with his wits slowed, Thor knew it...

...and Loki knew it too.
I KNEW THERE WAS A REASON I TAGGED ALONG ON THIS TRIP!
TAGGED ALONG? I'VE BEEN ALONE SINCE I LEFT ASGARD...
LET ME GUESS, LOKI-- YOU'VE BEEN STANDING RIGHT BEHIND HIM THE ENTIRE TIME?
I'M FULL OF SURPRISES, HERC. YOU KNOW THAT.
IS YOUR BOYFRIEND JOINING US...?
HE HAS SPACE BUSINESS, I HAVE EARTH BUSINESS. WE'RE "ON A BREAK," AS THE MORTALS SAY.
THAT'S WHAT NOH SAID, ALL RIGHT. I WONDERED IF YOU WERE ON BOARD WITH IT.
YOU WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO BE ON ANY APPS...?
ENOUGH. THERE IS WORK TO BE DONE, LOKI--AND I HAVE NOT FORGIVEN THEE FOR THY MISTAKES WITH TYR.
IF YOU WISH TO HELP, BE OF HELP--IF NOT, BEGONE.
HA! A FINE PAIR OF SIBLINGS--ONE THE SKALD AND ONE THE SCOLD!
HAVE YOU NO ROMANCE TO SPEAK OF, THOR?
EVEN AMONG THE STARS, I HEARD TALES OF YOU AND THE FAIR SHE-HULK...
THEN THE STARS ARE GOSSIPS. IT WAS A TIME AGO--AND AS TIME DOES, IT SLIPPED FROM MY FINGERS LIKE SAND.
LIKE DUST THAT ONCE WAS DIAMOND.

JUST AS WITH ROZ...AND JANE... AND EVEN SIF, WHO WAS MY LOVE IN SONG AND SAGA. TIME TICKED BY, AND NOW I AM ALONE.
IS IT THEN A WONDER, OLD FRIEND, THAT I WOULD RATHER TURN WHAT POOR THOUGHTS I HAVE TO ACTION THAN TO IDLE PLEASURES?
MAYBE YOURS ARE IDLE.
BUT YOUR WISDOM HAS NOT LEFT YOU YET, THOR. WE SHOULD INDEED SKIP THE SMALL TALK.
LOKI, YOU'RE THE EXPERT ON MAGIC AND THE TALES--IF WE WISHED TO QUESTION A RETURNED QUEEN OF NIGHT, WHERE MIGHT WE FIND HER?
WHY WOULDN'T SHE FIND YOU?
THE AVENGERS KILLED HER KIDS, DIDN'T THEY? I'D WANT REVENGE...
THEY WERE BEINGS OF POWER AND EVIL, LOKI--AND THEIR DEATHS CAME IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE. BUT YOU DO HAVE A POINT.
IF THE NIGHT QUEEN WAS AT HER FULL POWER, SHE COULD FIND ME AS SOON AS I SPOKE HER NAME.
SHE'S HAD TWO ENDLESS NIGHTS SINCE YOUR LAST MEETING. BY ALL THE RULES OF MAGIC, EVEN ONE WOULD OPEN THE DOOR FOR HER.
BUT...THOSE WERE SYMBIOTES AND DARKFORCE, NOT THE TURN OF THE EARTH.
SO MAYBE NYX NEEDS A NATURAL NIGHT TO RESTORE HER POWER.
WHERE CAN THE LONGEST NIGHT BE FOUND IN MIDSUMMER...?
And so--with his sibling and brother-in-arms at his call--the Odinson undertook a journey south...

...to the far Antarctic.
ON, TOOTHGNASHER! ON, TOOTHGRINDER! HUGINN AND MUNINN, GUIDE THEIR THUNDERING HOOVES!
BLIZZARD ABOVE, MAKE WAY FOR US! THE LORD OF STORMS COMMANDS IT!
TELL IT TO TURN THE HEATING UP A LITTLE!
I'M FREEZING--AND THAT'S A FROST GIANT TALKING...
YOU SHOULD HAVE DRESSED FOR THE WEATHER, LOKI. LIKE ME.
HIGH SUMMER IN THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE IS COLD WINTER IN THE SOUTH--COMPLETE WITH THE LONG WINTER NIGHTS.
AND HERE AT THE SOUTH POLE, THE NIGHT IS LONGEST OF ALL. THE SUN MAY NOT RISE FOR MONTHS...
IT SEEMS SUCH A SIMPLE DEDUCTION, SPOKEN ALOUD. WHERE ELSE WOULD A NIGHT-GODDESS RENEW HERSELF?
I SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF IT MYSELF.
YOU ARE THE SKALD OF REALMS, LOKI. CAN YOU NOT COUNTER AMORA'S SORCERY?
"HOCUS POCUS, MAGIC BE GONE"?
WHAT KIND OF STORY WOULD THAT BE?

LOKI--
I'M SERIOUS, THOR. I CAN'T JUST UNDO WHAT'S DONE.
IF YOU STOPPED THE MORTALS TELLING YOUR STORY--ALL OF THEM--THEN, MAYBE, WE COULD FORGE A NEW TALE...
EASIER TO TURN BACK THE OCEAN, I SUSPECT.
AYE. AMORA HAS WOVEN HERSELF DEEP INTO THAT WEB--AND SHE'LL NOT EASE HER HOLD ON ME WITHOUT A FIGHT...
...NOT WITHOUT GETTING WHAT SHE AND SKURGE WANT.
THOUGH ARE THOSE TWO WANTS THE SAME...?
HMM.
THE SOUND OF A BRIGHT NOTION DAWNING, IF I EVER HEARD IT.
MAYBE YOU'RE NOT SO AFFECTED BY THIS SPELL AS YOU FEAR YOU ARE...
PERHAPS.
OR PERHAPS I AM MY TRUE SELF MORE EASILY...
...WHEN IN THE COMPANY OF MY TRUEST FRIENDS.
COME--LET US HUNT THE NIGHT.

NO NEED, ODINSON.
THE NIGHT HAS HUNTED YOU.

BOR'S BREATH!
AND THE HYDRA'S TO JOIN IT!
THE NIGHT QUEEN IS NOT RECOVERING--SHE HAS RECOVERED ALL HER POWER AND MORE!
THEN WHY HAS SHE NOT TAKEN HER VENGEANCE...?
I KNOW NOT! WE SPOKE HER NAME--THAT ALONE SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT HER TO OUR DOOR!
YET SHE STAYED HERE, AMASSING POWER... FOR WHAT? WHAT COULD SHE POSSIBLY BE--?
OH NO.
WHAT WOULD THE MOTHER OF NIGHT WANT MORE THAN REVENGE, THOR?
WHAT DOES ANY MOTHER WANT?

THE BEST FOR HER BROOD.
MAKE A MOVE, GODLINGS...
...AND THIS ONE DIES.
APATE AND DOLOS. SECOND AND THIRD OF THE NIGHT MOTHER'S CHILDREN.
APATE'S BLADE IS THE RAGE OF IGNORANCE--HER BROTHER'S POWDERS CREATE ILLUSION. AND AN ILLUSION CAUSED THEIR END--AT THE NIGHT QUEEN'S OWN HAND...
THEN SHE HAS RECTIFIED HER ERROR.
AN ENDLESS NIGHT CALLED ME BACK FROM DUST AND ASH, SON OF ZEUS--TO AVENGE MYSELF ON THE AVENGERS.
A SECOND ENDLESS NIGHT RESTORED MY POWER... AND WITH IT, I JOURNEYED HERE. YOU WERE CORRECT WHEN YOU SPOKE MY NAME--I NEEDED NATURAL DARK.
I NEEDED THIS COLD WOMB...
...TO BRING LIFE TO THE CHILDREN I LOST.
REMEMBER ME, HERCULES? OIZYS THE WORM-DAUGHTER, WHO IS DESPAIR?

YOUR DESPAIR TASTED SWEET, SON OF DEAD OLYMPUS...BUT I THINK...
...YOUR NORSE FRIEND'S WILL BE SWEETER!
ISN'T THAT TRUE, O KING OF ASGARD...?
NO!
JUST THINK ABOUT ALL THE MISTAKES YOU'VE MADE. THE TRAPS YOU'VE FALLEN INTO. YOUR BROTHER HERMOD, WHO YOU ALLOWED TO DIE.
THINK HOW MANY YOU'VE LET DIE. HOW OFTEN YOU'VE FAILED...
THOR-- YOU HAVE TO FIGHT IT!
OIZYS CAN BE FOUGHT, IF YOU ONLY--
HERCULES.

PLOOM
YES. I DON'T THINK WE'VE *MET.*
I AM *HYPNOS*--THE *FIRSTBORN* SON OF NYX. THE *GOD OF SLEEP...*
GAH! UNDER THE *SNOW*--
...SO GO TO *SLEEP*, HERCULES.
SLEEP LIKE THE DEAD.
LOOK *THERE*, THUNDERER.
nn... nay...
OH, YES. YOU'RE ABOUT TO FAIL SOMEONE *ELSE.*
AND THERE'S *NOTHING* YOU CAN DO TO--
I *SAID*... THEE...

KRAKOOM
...NAY!
AAKK!
FOR I AM NO STRANGER TO DARK DESPAIR, CREATURE! I KNOW ITS CALL WELL!
BUT WHEN I AM NEEDED--
--THE CALL TO ACTION IS GREATER!
WHAMM
UNNHH--
WELL STRUCK, THOR. A LITTLE TOO WELL STRUCK.
nn...
WE DID WARN THEM, DIDN'T WE, SISTER?
YES, WE DID.
SHLIKK

...
YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE **DONE** THAT, APATE.
Thor's voice was of stone, as cold as the ice about him.
HAVE I MADE YOU *ANGRY*, VIKING? *GOOD.*
ANGER IS WHAT I AM GODDESS OF--
SISTER?
Yet Apate was wrong.
WHY...?
...
DOLOS?
There was no rage to be heard there--only a grim, quiet ***presentiment.***
This was an ill omen. Thor knew it in his bones.
NOT *AGAIN! NOT AGAIN!*
APATE, WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE...?*
For what manner of trick would end the son in front of the mother's eyes?

And what manner of trickster?
IT WASN'T ME! IT WAS LOKI'S THROAT I CUT!
I SWEAR IT, MOTHER--
CAREFUL.
YOU DON'T WANT TO GET CAUGHT IN A LIE.
BUT SERIOUSLY, FOLKS--ILLUSIONS? AGAINST ME? WHY NOT HIT MY BROTHER WITH A FOAM MALLET?
HA! THERE IS THE TRICKSTER I'VE HEARD TALES ABOUT--
NAY.
THAT IS NOT ANY LOKI YOU HAVE HEARD OF.
THAT IS THE TRUE SKALD... IN THEIR MOST POWERFUL ASPECT.
AS MY ENEMY.

THE ENEMY YOU NEED, THOR. REMEMBER?
AND I WILL NOT CODDLE YOU.
KILLER OF MY KIN!
YOU WILL DIE A THOUSAND TIMES FOR EACH DROP OF HIS BLOOD--
OR YOU.
BUT YOU BOTH SEEM WELL MATCHED AGAINST EACH OTHER IN THIS DARK, COLD PLACE.
SO WHAT OF A PLACE THAT'S DARKER? AND COLDER? WITH A GREATER DANGER LURKING...?
NO! NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR THIS! DO NOT TEST ME, LOKI!
LOKI!
BUT IT'S ALL A TEST, BROTHER.
A TEST TO DESTRUCTION...
But Thor heard Loki not...for Thor was gone.

And Hercules with him.
...
SO, WHERE ARE WE?
AND WHY WOULD LOKI *SEND* US HERE...?
THE *FIRST*, I KNOW NOT.
THE *SECOND*... THERE *IS* REASON BEHIND IT. REASON AND *RIDDLE*--A CHALLENGE, A *TEST*...
THOSE *ENERGIES* LOKI CAST TO BANISH US HERE...THEY TOOK THE SHAPE OF THE RUNE *URUZ*. ONE OF THE RUNES OF MY *OWN NAME*.
THE RUNE OF *ENDURANCE* AND *SURVIVAL*...
SURVIVAL MAY BE *DIFFICULT*. EVEN THE SOUTH POLE WAS NOT *THIS* COLD.
AND SOMEWHERE IN THIS STYGIAN DARK, THE *NIGHT QUEEN* AND HER *CHILDREN* LURK...
WORRY NOT OF *THEM*, BOY.
OH.
OH NO.
WHERE ARE YOU?
YOU ARE IN A *LAND WITHOUT SUNS*, HERAKLES.

AND THY FATHER ZEUS...
...WOULD HAVE WORDS.

THE VENGEANCE OF THE GODS

"Then zeus no longer held back his might; but straight his heart was filled with fury and he showed forth all his strength. From heaven and from olympus he came forthwith, hurling his lightning: the bolts flew thick and fast from his strong hand..."

- "The Theogony,"
Hesiod

This is a story of long ago, and now. A story of dark fate.
It began in the time of forming...when myths were etched in hot blood...
HE'S EATING THEM?
...when Thor's mother Gaea, in the deep earth, heard the entreaties of another child.
YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE, MOTHER.
YOU PLACED THE SICKLE IN HIS HAND AND BADE HIM CASTRATE AND KILL HIS OWN FATHER, GREAT OURANOS...
...AND OURANOS, WITH DYING BREATH, MADE PROPHECY--THAT MY HUSBAND'S CHILD WOULD TAKE HIS LIFE AND STEAL HIS THRONE IN TURN.
THE SEASONS CHANGE. OURANOS WOULD NOT.
SUMMER TURNS TO AUTUMN, WINTER TO SPRING--AND ALL THINGS MUST LIVE AND GROW...OR WITHER AND DIE.
SO I DECREED IN PRIMAL TIME--SO I DECREE NOW. THIS AGE OF DEATHLESS GODS IS NO EXCEPTION.
BUT MY HUSBAND--HIS SON AND YOURS--WISHES ONLY TO LIVE, NOT TO GROW.
SO NOW... EACH TIME I GIVE BIRTH...

"...CRONUS DEVOURS HIS CHILDREN."

SO IF THE CHILDREN ARE DEVOURED AT BIRTH... WHAT HAVE YOU THERE, RHEA?
A SON I BORE IN SECRET. BUT I FEAR CRONUS ALREADY SUSPECTS HIS EXISTENCE.
WHEREVER I HIDE THE CHILD, HE WILL BE HUNTED AND SWALLOWED ALIVE...
NOT IF YOU GIVE CRONUS THIS.
A STONE...?
I HAVE PLACED A MEASURE OF LIFE IN IT. IT WILL SATISFY HIS DARK HUNGER...
I--I DON'T... YOUR EYES...
WHAT OF MY TRUE SON? WHAT OF ZEUS...?
HE WILL REMAIN WITH ME.
GIVE ME THE CHILD, DAUGHTER.
N-NO--
GIVE ME THE CHILD!

Rhea turned from that place and **ran**, with all the fear of winter in her heart. Yet when she looked down at the soft bundle in her arms...
...she saw only a **stone**.
HUSH, LITTLE ONE. DO NOT CRY. I HAVE A ***GIFT*** FOR YOU.
I HAVE SEEN A ***NEED***, FAR AHEAD IN TIME. A NEED FOR A ***GREAT CHAMPION***, WHO FIGHTS FOR THE ***LIVING EARTH*** AND THE LIVES I MADE ***UPON*** IT.
WHO KNOWS ***STORM*** AND ***SUNLIGHT***. WHO KNOWS ***FIRE*** BUT IS ***BEYOND*** THE FIRE. ONE WHO WILL CALL ***SPRING*** FROM THE ***WINTER***.
ONE BORN FROM ***MY BLOOD***... WHO IS MY ***MERCY***.
IS THAT ***YOU***, LITTLE ONE? HAVE YOU THE ***QUICKNESS OF MIND?*** THE ***STRENGTH OF SPIRIT?***
CAN YOU BEAR THE WORTHY BURDEN IN YOUR HAND?
ARE YOU THE SACRIFICE...?

...no.
THE POTENTIAL IS THERE...BUT YOU HAVE YOUR FATHER'S EYES, AND I FEAR YOU CANNOT GAIN THE NECESSARY WISDOM.
BUT AS A PROTOTYPE... A PATTERN FOR THE ONE TO COME...AS A FINAL TEST...
PERHAPS. PERHAPS.
BEHOLD THE UTGARD-KEY.
IT OPENS THE GATE--BUT ONLY A CRACK THIS TIME. ONLY ENOUGH FOR A GLIMPSE OF MY KIND TO ESCAPE IT.
YOU ARE A SKYFATHER FROM A SKYFATHER'S LINE--AND THUS THE LIGHTNING IS YOUR BIRTHRIGHT, HELD BY YOUR HAND...
...BUT TORANOS WAS MORE THAN THE STORM. AND MORE WILL BE NEEDED.
SO IN HIS NAME AND MINE, I MARK YOU, SON OF CRONUS. I MARK YOU WITH HIS SHADOW. I MARK YOU FOR ALL TIME.
I MARK YOU WITH THE WHEEL OF FATE.
Zeus would come to overthrow Cronus--and retrieve his siblings from the lands of death.

But the wheel was upon him then. And as it turned, it led to a dark change in Zeus and to his exile--to a dimension without suns or sunlight.
The same dimension that Thor and Hercules found themselves in now...at Loki's hand.
THE WHEEL HAS TURNED! AND ZEUS IS RISEN FROM DEATH!
FATHER...
YOU WERE RIGHT, HERCULES.
THIS IS GODLY BUSINESS.
AND IT DOES SEEM VERY MUCH LIKE THOR'S.

YOUR BUSINESS? YOU?
A PETTY NOTHING-GOD! THUNDERER OF A BRUTAL AND BACKWATER LAND!
WORSHIPPED BY BARBARIANS! BY RAIDERS AND SAVAGES!
MY WORSHIPPERS INVENTED REASON! CONJURED PHILOSOPHY! CIVILIZATION WAS BORN FROM THEIR VAST INTELLECTS!
WHILE YOUR MEAGER THRALLS SQUATTED IN HUTS!
YOUR ONLY BUSINESS WITH ME, SQUALL-GOD--
--IS TO KISS THE GROUND AT MY FEET!

THOR--
TURN.
KRTOOM
MY THANKS, LITTLE LIGHTNING. I HAD NO QUARREL WITH THEE--ONLY WITH THY SO-CALLED MASTER.
FOR THAT IS THE BUSINESS I HAVE WITH THEE, ZEUS OF THE PHILOSOPHERS--THE BUSINESS OF STORM-GODS.
THE BUSINESS OF SKYFATHERS...
AND ONLY SKY-FATHERS, THOR?

FOR THE *SKYMOTHER* WOULD SPEAK WITH YOU *ALL*.
NYX!
YOU... *KILLED* ME...
AND WOULD THAT MY SNAPPING OF YOUR FAT NECK HAD *TAKEN*.
BUT IT SEEMS THIS *REBORN* ZEUS IS AS PROUD AND ARROGANT AS THE ZEUS THAT CAME *BEFORE*...
AND *THAT* IS WHY WE *SOUGHT YOU OUT*, MOTHER OF NIGHT. WAS HIS RETURN *YOUR* DOING?
WHAT DO *YOU* KNOW OF THE WHEEL THAT TURNED IN HIM?
WHAT *COULD* I KNOW OF SUCH? I AM NOT THY *MOTHER*, WHO IS THE CHANGING SEASON. I AM NOT THE *RISING* OF THE SUN, NOR AM I ITS *SETTING*.
I AM SIMPLY THE COLD CALM OF THE *MIDNIGHT*...THE STILLNESS OF THE *BREEZE*...THE CHIRP OF THE *CRICKETS*...

...AND THE *MOON* THAT HANGS OVERHEAD.
THEN SORRY AM I TO HAVE *TROUBLED* YOU, GRACIOUS LADY.
WE SHALL CONTINUE THIS CONVERSATION UNDER *ANOTHER* SKY.
EH?
THE *DIMENSIONAL WINDS*...?
THE SQUALL-GOD *FLEES!* SCURRYING BACK TO HIS *THATCHED HUT*, NO DOUBT! *LIKE A RABBIT TO ITS BURROW!*
WELL, *ZEUS* WILL NOT RUN! ZEUS *STANDS*--TO *BRAVE WHAT MAY COME*--
--THOUGH THE SKY ITSELF MAY FALL...
For **this** was the power of the Night's Mother--to call the moon to the sky, then **crash it into the land below.**
As it was in **Zeus'** power to **withstand** such conflagration...

...and in Thor's to have the sense to place himself far from it.
I MISLIKE RUNNING FROM A FIGHT, THOR!
WHETHER IT IS WITH MY ERRANT FATHER OR SHE WHO MADE HIM AS HE IS NOW THROUGH BLOODY MURDER--
AYE, THERE SPEAKS THE HOTHEADED HERCULES I'VE KNOWN.
AND I FEAR HIS HOUR OF BATTLE WILL COME SOON ENOUGH. I BOUGHT A MOMENT TO THINK--NOT TO FLEE.
'TIS LOKI'S RUNE-SPELL THAT HOLDS US IN THIS SUNLESS REALM. THE DIMENSIONAL WINDS CAN RELOCATE US WITHIN IT--BUT NOT RETURN US WHENCE WE CAME.
NOT UNTIL THE RIDDLE IS SOLVED...
AND YOU OWE ME AN EXPLANATION FOR THAT AS WELL. WHAT IS LOKI TO YOU NOW? HERO OR VILLAIN? FRIEND OR FOE...?
THEY ARE BOTH AND NEITHER--FOR THEY ARE AS THEY MUST BE, TO TEACH WHAT MUST BE TAUGHT.
BUT YOU KNOW HOW THAT WORKS...
...DON'T YOU, BROTHER?
THOR! HAVE YOU MET ATHENA? GREEK GODDESS OF WISDOM--AND SINCE HER WHEEL TURNED, THE WISDOM BEYOND WISDOM.
WE'RE GETTING ALONG FAMOUSLY!

AYE, I'M SURE YOU ARE.
LOKI...YOU ARE MY KIN, SO I ACCEPT YOU IN ALL YOUR ASPECTS. YOU ARE THE TELLER, AND SUCH IS THE TALE--BUT IT IS MY TALE.
HERCULES DID NOT NEED TO BE A PART OF IT.
I COULD SAY THE SAME FOR TYR, AND POOR LOST HERMOD. I WARN THEE, LOKI-- MY PATIENCE IS NOT FOREVER.
WHEN YOU MAKE MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY PART OF THY GAMES--
HOW MANY TIMES, THOR? THIS IS NO GAME.
YOU FACED A TEST AND GAINED A WEAPON-- TORMOD, THE SHARP AX OF THY WIT. FIRST OF THREE.
YOUR SECOND TEST IS UPON YOU NOW...
AYE. A RUNE-RIDDLE.
AND THE RUNE WE PLAY BY IS URUZ--RUNE OF ENDURANCE AND TENACITY, OF COURAGE AGAINST THE ODDS. A RUNE OF MY NAME.
WHAT LESSON WOULD YOU HAVE IT TEACH ME...?
AND WHY COULDN'T WE LEARN IT AT HOME?
BECAUSE IT IS NOT HIS TRIAL ALONE, BROTHER.
AND SOME TRIALS CANNOT BE AVOIDED...
YOU SPEAK TRUE, DAUGHTER. FOR THERE IS NO ESCAPE...
...FROM OUR POWER.

FATHER?
YOU AND NYX...?
HAVE REACHED AN ACCORD. SHE IS A BEING OF GREAT POWER AND GREAT DARKNESS--AND THE ZEUS THAT WAS SAW IN HER A BEING TO BE FEARED.
I SEE A MIRROR.
TOGETHER, WE SHALL RAISE A NEW RACE OF DEATHLESS GODS!
TO CONQUER ALL THAT IS!
SO CHANGED, YET SO MUCH THE SAME...
AS ALL-FATHER, I HAVE THE POWER TO OFFICIATE AT WEDDINGS.
BUT I ASSUME THAT'S NOT WHY YOU'RE HERE...
THE SKYFATHER'S PROPOSAL INTRIGUES ME. AND I HAVE THE POWER TO FREE HIM FROM THIS DIMENSION OF EXILE...BUT FIRST, I MUST FREE MYSELF.
AND THOUGH LOKI'S RUNE SEEMS A SMALL TRINKET, IT CAGES ME ALL THE SAME. A CURIOSITY... BUT NOT ONE I CAN ALLOW.
PROVE YOUR WORTH, THEN, ZEUS.

LET IT BE SO!
IN NIGHT'S NAME, LOKI DIES-- AND WITH THE REST OF YOU! THE SQUALL-GOD AND MY WAYWARD BRATS!
THEY'LL SHARE THE FATE OF ALL THE WORLDS AND STARS--
--AS CINDERS IN MY WAKE!
TURN.
YOU DARE--?
EVEN AS ENEMY, LOKI IS MY PUZZLE TO SOLVE... MY KIN TO PROTECT. AS THE STORM--EVEN YOURS--IS MINE TO COMMAND.
SO THROW YOUR THUNDERBOLTS, MIGHTY ZEUS. THEY WILL NEVER REACH ME.
OH DEAR.
...?

WILL THEY NOT?
ARE YOU SURE?
TURN.
KRRHOOOM
SHOULD I HELP...?
NO!
TURN.
THE NEXT ONE-- ≠AUHHM≠--TURN AS WELL.
KROOMM
BUT SOME FATES CANNOT BE AVOIDED...
DAMN YOU! STOP FLINCHING!
TAKE IT LIKE A GOD!
TURN--
NO!
DO AS HE SAYS, THOR! THAT IS THE ANSWER!
TO TAKE IT LIKE A GOD!
Thor was not on Midgard now, nor under the spell that slowed his mind there. His wit was once more a keen, sharp blade.
Thus, as he heard the words...

...
OF COURSE.
...he cut to the core of their meaning.
IS THAT CHEATING?
JUST PASSING ON MY SISTER'S WISDOM. AND, I HOPE, A CORRECT READING OF THE RUNE.
SOME TRIALS CAN'T BE AVOIDED FOREVER.
AYE--THEY MUST BE ENDURED, FOR ENDURING THEM MAY GIVE US DEEPER STRENGTH.
SO LET ME GET IN CLOSE...
YOU HAD MUCH TO SAY BEFORE OF YOUR WORSHIPPERS, ZEUS. I UNDERSTAND THEY WERE GREAT WRESTLERS, ALSO.
WOULD YOU DEMONSTRATE THE ART?
YOU--YOU WOULD LAY YOUR GRUBBY, LOWBORN HANDS ON THE FATHER OF OLYMPUS?
IT ONLY SEALS YOUR DOOM!
YOU COULD TURN THE LIGHTNING WHEN I HURLED IT FROM AFAR, PEASANT-GOD!
BUT HOW WILL YOU DEFLECT IT NOW--

--WHEN I SUMMON IT **INSIDE** YOU?
OF COURSE, I HAVE BEEN WRONG *BEFORE*...

IT SEEMS THE THUNDERER'S TIME IS *DONE,* HERCULES.
AND *YOURS* AS WELL...
YOU THINK SO, NYX?
YOU MAY BE *RIGHT...*
...BUT *STAY* YOUR MERCILESS HAND FOR JUST A MOMENT.
BEHOLD.
THOR ENDURES.
THIS *WILL NOT END,* THOR! I WILL NOT STOP UNTIL *ONE OF US IS DEAD!*
AND I-- NNHH--WOULD HAVE IT *NO OTHER WAY!*
LET LOOSE *ALL THY POWER,* ZEUS! THOUGH IT *SEARS ME TO THE BONE*--I OPEN MYSELF *TO* IT!
INSOLENT WORM! YOU ARE IN *AGONY*--YET YOU *STILL* DEFY ME? *SO BE IT,* GOD OF THE NORSEMEN!
GO TO YOUR GRAVE-BARROW WITH PRIDE!

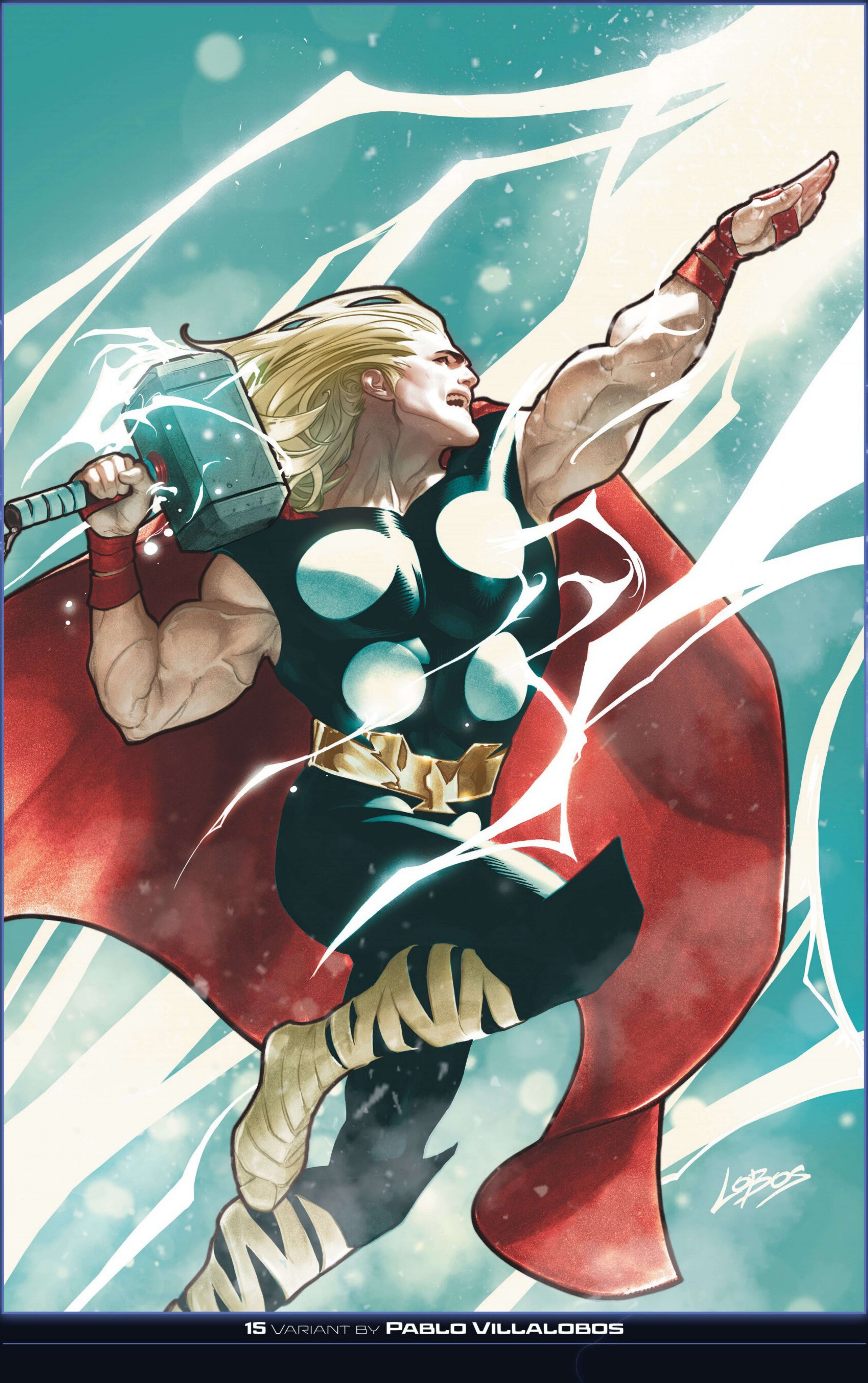
HE FACES HIS TEST *HEAD-ON*-- AS *I* WOULD. AND I MUST LEARN FROM *HIM*.
I ACCEPT YOU, NYX. AND *MORE* THAN THAT...
...*I FORGIVE* YOU.
YOU... FORGIVE *ME?*
YOU WOULD *DARE*--?
I DARE *ANYTHING*.
AND WHAT IS THE *ALTERNATIVE*, QUEEN OF THE NIGHT?
YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN *RETURNED FROM DEATH*-- AND *I'VE* ESCAPED HADES MORE THAN ONCE MYSELF.
NO MATTER *WHO KILLS WHO*, WE'LL BE *BACK*. ARE WE THEN TO FIGHT ONE ANOTHER TO THE *END OF TIME?*
FINE WORDS. BUT I KNOW THY *DEEDS*.
YOU HAVE ALLIED WITH *THOR*-- AND THUS, WITH *LOKI*. TAKING SIDES WITH THE ONE WHO *TRAPPED ME HERE*--
AND LOOK WHERE YOU ARE TRAPPED!
NO *SUNS*, NO *DAYLIGHT*-- ONLY *NIGHT*, STRETCHING OUT FOREVER!
IS THIS NOT THE HOME YOU'VE *ALWAYS SOUGHT*, MY LADY?
IS THIS NOT THY *TRUE PLACE OF POWER?*

I NEVER SAW...
YES. I COULD *BUILD* HERE.
I COULD CREATE *TEMPLES* TO THIS STILLNESS. MAKE *WORLDS* IN THE DARK AND PEOPLE THEM WITH *LOVERS* AND *POETS*.
NO LONGER LESSER TO *ZEUS*, NOR EVEN HIS *EQUAL*... BUT *BEYOND HIM ENTIRELY*...
WHAT OF *VENGEANCE*, MOTHER?
WHAT OF BROTHER *DOLOS*, WHOSE *BLOOD* WAS SHED...?
BY *YOU*, ANGER'S CHILD.
STILL, I COULD RETURN HIM *AGAIN*.
FOR PERHAPS THERE WILL BE A *NEED* FOR WRATH, DECEIT AND DESPAIR IN THE UNIVERSES I CREATE.
WE SHALL SEE.
MOTHER, *NO*--
FOR NOW...*HYPNOS*. MY *DREAMER*-- MY TRUEST CHILD.
RETURN WITH HERCULES. *YOU* WILL BE MY *EYES AND EARS* IN THE OLD WORLD...
AS YOU COMMAND.
WHAT *ABOUT* IT, LOKI? READY TO SEND US *HOME*?
BECAUSE IF *NOT*... WELL, I THINK NYX *OUTRANKS* YOU NOW--
IT'S NOT ME.

URUZ HAS POWER HERE. AND IT'S NOT SATISFIED.
FOR THOR'S TEST IS ONLY BEGUN...
BUT--HE ENDURES ZEUS' LIGHTNING--
DOES HE?
WATCH.
CURSE YOU, NORSEMAN! YOU SHOULD BE NAUGHT BUT AN EMBER IN THE FACE OF THIS POWER!
YOU SHOULD BE BURNING AS FUEL!
A FITTING ANALOGY, ZEUS.
FOR ONE OF US IS FUEL.
I SPOKE EARLIER THAT WE SHARED THE BUSINESS OF SKYFATHERS. AND THE BUSINESS OF SKYFATHERS IS POWER. THE ALL-POWER.
YOU POUR YOURS INTO ME-- AS IF I WERE NOT ALREADY THE VESSEL FOR IT.
YOU HAVE GRACIOUSLY GIVEN SO MUCH, LORD OF OLYMPUS.
NOW... GIVE ME THE REST.
N-NO...
I SAID GIVE ME THE REST!
GIVE ME IT ALL!

This is a story of dark fate.
A story of long ago...
'Tis done.
The power of Zeus.
And the power of Odin.
No...
In one god.
Thor... There is something new in your voice that I like not.
An echo of darkness...
Only begun.
...and now.
You have nothing to fear, Hercules. You, surely, will understand.
I see it so clearly.
What, Thor? What do you see...?

THE WHEEL



15 VARIANT BY **PABLO VILLALOBOS**

15

"MORE POWERFUL ARE,
IN THE NIGHT-SEASON,
ALL DEAD WARRIORS,
THAN IN THE LIGHT OF DAY."

- FROM "THE SECOND LAY OF HELGI HUNDINGCIDE,"
THE ELDER EDDAS OF SAEMUND SIGFUSSON

The end began in darkness.
KLIK
And when light came, it brought no illumination.
Only more questions.
Such is the clockwork of events.
What is playing out **now**, without your knowledge? What **secret deeds** in **secret rooms?**
The wheel has turned.
The wheel turns.
The wheel readies to turn.
Understand ye yet, or what?

Thor, too, was in a place of darkness, holding light without illumination.
He faced the **true** test of Uruz now.
THE **WHEEL**...
...TURNS.
AND IT WILL **CRUSH** THIS STAGNATION BENEATH ITS TERRIBLE **WEIGHT**...
He was **failing.**

THOR! YOU MUST HEAR ME!
YOU HAVE ABSORBED MY FATHER'S POWER--BUT ALSO THE DARKNESS THAT CLAIMED HIM! AND THAT DARKNESS WILL EAT YOU ALIVE!
YOU MUST LET THE POWER GO, MY FRIEND--
MUST HE, HERCULES?
IF THOR RELEASES THE POWER, IT WILL RETURN TO ZEUS. AND THEN WE RETURN TO WHERE WE BEGAN...
THEN HELP HIM! DRAW OFF THE POWER OF ZEUS--TAKE IT YOURSELF, IF YOU MUST--
I "MUST" NOTHING, SLAYER OF MY CHILDREN.
I HAVE ALL THE POWER I NEED--AS YOU YOURSELF ATTESTED.
I HAVE CHARGED MY SON HYPNOS WITH MATTERS RELATING TO THE DAYLIGHT. TO HEROES AND THEIR SQUABBLES.
TO ME, THOR IS A TINY LIGHTNING BUG IN A NIGHT THE SIZE OF A UNIVERSE.
MY NIGHT...
...WHICH NEEDS MY FULL ATTENTION.
NYX! COME BACK!
NYX!
THOR'S YOUR FRIEND, HERC. AND ZEUS IS YOUR FATHER--

--BY ANY MEASURE, THIS IS YOUR BUSINESS.
SO THE NIGHT MOTHER ISN'T WRONG...
A CURSE ON HER! AND ON YOU!
AND YOUR THRICE-DAMNED RUNE-RIDDLES!
YOU BROUGHT US TO THIS PASS, LOKI!
GIVE ME ONE GOOD REASON WHY I SHOULDN'T KNOCK YOUR FOOL HEAD OFF YOUR SHOULDERS--
BECAUSE YOU'RE WISER THAN THAT.
AREN'T YOU?
YOU HAVE ALREADY PASSED THE TEST OF URUZ, BROTHER...
HOW WOULD YOU KNOW? WE'RE GREEK GODS, ATHENA! THESE AREN'T OUR RUNES--THIS IS NOT OUR MAGIC!
I AM LOST IN THIS. I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT URUZ MEANS.
ENDURANCE--BUT WHAT KIND? WHAT DOES IT RELATE TO?
URUZ... REPRESENTING THE AUROCHS.
AUDUMBLA'S CHILDREN, THE WILD CATTLE.
PRIMAL BEASTS THAT GAVE MILK AND LIFE--YET RAGED AND RAN AND BROUGHT DEATH IN A STAMPEDE OF HOOVES.
NOW, THEY ARE GONE FROM THE EARTH... BECAUSE OF MORTALS.
And as the skald spoke...

...the All-Father heard.
Aye...the old beasts died...
Victims of the turning wheel!
...or were tamed...
All things must perish! All must face death and the end!
Be...be silent...
Even gods must bow to fate! And fate bows to me!
For the wheel of fate--
--is in my hand!
In my hand...
Aye.
I know what I must do.

CALL DOWN THE LIGHTNING! CALL DOWN FATE! CALL DOWN EVERYTHING I HAVE BEEN MADE HEIR TO--
--THE HAND OF THOR IS UPON IT ALL!
AND I HAVE THE POWER TO CARVE MY IMAGE INTO THE BURNING STARS THEMSELVES...
THOR...
...BUT IT IS THE POWER THAT SPEAKS THUS. NOT I.
THE POWER OF ZEUS! THAT CANNOT BE FOUGHT!
YET DID NOT ZEUS CONTAIN THE POWER IN HIS HAND AS A GOLDEN THUNDERBOLT...?
AND DID MY OWN FATHER NOT CAGE VAST POWERS IN MATTER IN AGES PAST?
I WILL NOT BE TAMED--
--YET I MUST TRY.
I MUST USE ZEUS' POWER AGAINST ITSELF, TO FORCE IT TO MY PATTERN.
A PATTERN I KNOW WELL...
The energies writhed in Thor's grip and in his mind...yet he worked them to his will.
Into the shape he associated with his strongest self...
And thus was born the golden belt Yolgjörd.

Yolgjörd the enduring one. Yolgjörd the protector. Yolgjörd, second of three. Would you know more?
More will be told.
'TIS DONE.
THOR...?
I HAVE USED THE POWER OF ZEUS TO CAGE THE POWER OF ZEUS--IN MATTER...
...AND IN ONE PARTICULAR PURPOSE.
IN ANSWER TO THE RIDDLE OF URUZ...?
THE ANSWER TO ALL THY RIDDLES.
'TIS A GIRDLE OF ENDURANCE AGAINST DARK POWER-- AND WHAT IS THE DARKEST POWER I'VE FACED OF LATE?
MAGIC.
RUNE-MAGIC, SKALD-MAGIC-- YOUR MAGIC, LOKI.
BUT YOU HOLD NO POWER OVER ME NOW...
...AND I HAVE POWER OVER YOU. YOU WHO-- AS A TEST--NEARLY MADE ME TWICE THE MONSTER ZEUS HAS BECOME.
I SWORE TO TRUST YOU, LOKI, EVEN AS MY ENEMY... YET ONLY AS MY ENEMY. MORE AND MORE, THY SCHEMES ENDANGER OTHERS--AND THAT I CANNOT ALLOW.
THE ALL-FATHER MUST THINK OF ALL.

THEN THINK ON YOUR NEXT EDICT MOST CAREFULLY, ALL-FATHER. SPEAK NOT IN HASTE, NOR ANGER.
THERE MAY BE CONSEQUENCES.
But the words fell on deaf ears. Thor was resolute, though it pained him greatly...
...and though it would cost him dear.
I AM DECIDED. IF ASGARD NEEDS A SKALD, IT MUST LOOK ELSEWHERE.
BY THE ALL-POWER-- AND BY MY WILL--
--I BANISH THEE FROM THE GOLDEN REALM!
AND FROM MY SIGHT!
The words were indeed spoken in haste--yet the Odin-force was upon them and in them.
Loki was now gone from Asgard--and from Thor.
As the smoke cleared, Thor felt a chill run through him--akin to the first touch of a cold winter.
But he heeded it not. For Loki had done too much to forgive in a short time...
...and Thor believed he had a long one.
COME, MY FRIENDS.
LET US JOURNEY HOME.

Never did Asgard look more glorious than when Thor arrived at the end of the Rainbow Bridge.
The belt Yolgjörd was indeed proof against Loki's rune-craft--and it seemed to Thor that it might provide the solution to other troubles besides.
Still, he was wary.
At his back, that winter's wind blew still.
'TIS WELL THAT YOU HAVE RETURNED, ALL-FATHER. A SITUATION REQUIRES THY ATTENTION...
AND I AM AT ASGARD'S SERVICE, LADY SIF. BUT FIRST, MY GUESTS HAVE NEEDS OF THEIR OWN.
HYPNOS WILL NEED LODGINGS--ATHENA TOO, PERHAPS. AND THE SKYFATHER ZEUS WILL NEED THE CARE OF OUR PHYSICIANS.
I WAS FORCED TO STRIP HIM OF HIS POWER, AND CAST THAT POWER IN A NEW SHAPE...
AYE. I NOTICED THE BRIGHT NEW BELT.
AND THY CAUTION OF IT...
AS EVER, YOU SEE MUCH.
YOLGJÖRD IS A BELT OF PROTECTION--YET IT PROTECTS THE MOST AGAINST ITSELF. I MUST TREAT IT WITH CARE.
BUT ENOUGH OF MY TROUBLES. WHAT NEED HAS THE REALM OF ME?
AN ASGARDIAN HAS RETURNED TO US FROM FAR LANDS--AND REQUESTS AN AUDIENCE WITH THEE, IN THINE OWN HALL.
INTRIGUING! SHOULD I COME ALONG?
THY HELP IS EVER APPRECIATED, MY FRIEND--BUT FOR NOW, SEE TO THY FAMILY.
THIS WILL LIKELY BE SOME DRY MATTER OF DIPLOMACY...
WAIT.
WHICH ASGARDIAN?

ENCHANTRESS...!
HELLO, THOR.
NICE PLACE YOU HAVE HERE.
WHAT BUSINESS HAVE YOU HERE...?
I WANTED A CLOSER LOOK AT YOUR AX. THE WORKMANSHIP OF THE BLADE IS VERY FINE.
I DIDN'T GET THE CHANCE TO PROPERLY ADMIRE IT WHEN IT WAS BURIED IN DARIO AGGER'S BACK...
YOU LET HER IN?
YOU LEFT NO INSTRUCTION NOT TO.
I KNOW YOU TWO ARE FIGHTING... AS YOU DO...BUT AMORA IS AS MUCH OF ASGARD AS ANY OF US.
AND THE QUESTION OF WHO BELONGS IN THE GOLDEN REALM IS NOT DECIDED BY YOUR PERSONAL FEELINGS.
OR IS IT...?

YOU SEE MUCH, SIF.
BUT WE WILL SPEAK ON SUCH MATTERS AT ANOTHER TIME.
AS YOU WISH.
AMORA?
YOU WERE DEAR TO MY BROTHER-- AND YOU HAVE DONE GREAT DEEDS FOR ASGARD, IN TIMES GONE BY. BUT THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT ONLY GOES SO FAR.
KNOW THAT I AM WATCHING.
SHE'S BEING VERY GENEROUS. I DIDN'T THINK SHE'D FORGIVEN ME FOR ALL THOSE MEAN THINGS I SAID ABOUT BILL.
HOW ARE SHE AND BILL? I HEARD RUMORS OF A ROUGH PATCH-- ARE THEY STILL TOGETHER?
AMORA...
BECAUSE YOU AND HER ARE STILL VERY MUCH APART, AREN'T YOU?
YOU AND EVERYONE ARE VERY MUCH--
AMORA.
ENOUGH.
I AM TOO TIRED FOR SUCH GAMES. THE ALL-SLEEP IS IN MY BONES AFTER HARD BATTLES AND HARSH CHOICES, AND I WOULD BE ALONE WITH IT.
JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT.

I THOUGHT SKURGE EXPLAINED IT QUITE WELL...
SO YOU'VE COME TO PLEAD HIS CASE? TELL ME TO GIVE HIM MY HAMMER AND MY AX AND THIS BELT?
SO HE CAN SAVE ME FROM SOME COMING DANGER, AS IF MY OWN DEATH IS NOT MINE TO CARRY...
LIKE ODIN, MEDDLING FROM VALHALLA AS IF I AM STILL A CHILD. LIKE LOKI, HERDING ME THROUGH RIDDLES LIKE A MOUSE IN A MAZE.
EVEN MY MOTHER HAD A DESTINY IN MIND FOR ME...BEFORE I WAS EVEN BORN...
...AND I AM SO...TIRED... OF OTHERS TRYING TO DECIDE MY FATE.
THEN I GIVE YOU MY WORD.
THAT OUT OF EVERYONE WHO CARES FOR YOU-- AND I STILL DO, THOR--
--I WILL NEVER TRY TO SAVE YOU FROM DANGER.

WELL DO I KNOW IT.
BUT IS THAT A DANCE WE TWO SHOULD DO AGAIN...?
WELL...WE DO KNOW ALL THE STEPS BY HEART.
HA! BE CAREFUL, AMORA.
SIF MAY BURST IN, SWORD READIED, TO SAVE ME FROM THY ENSORCELLED KISS...
... WHAT KISS?
FEELING ENSORCELLED?
NAY.
FOILED AGAIN.
SO. HERE WE ARE.
WILL YOU SAY IT, OR SHALL I?
'TIS...NOT A GOOD IDEA.
'TIS NOT A GOOD IDEA. NOW ESPECIALLY.
BUT WOULDN'T IT BE NICE IF IT WERE?

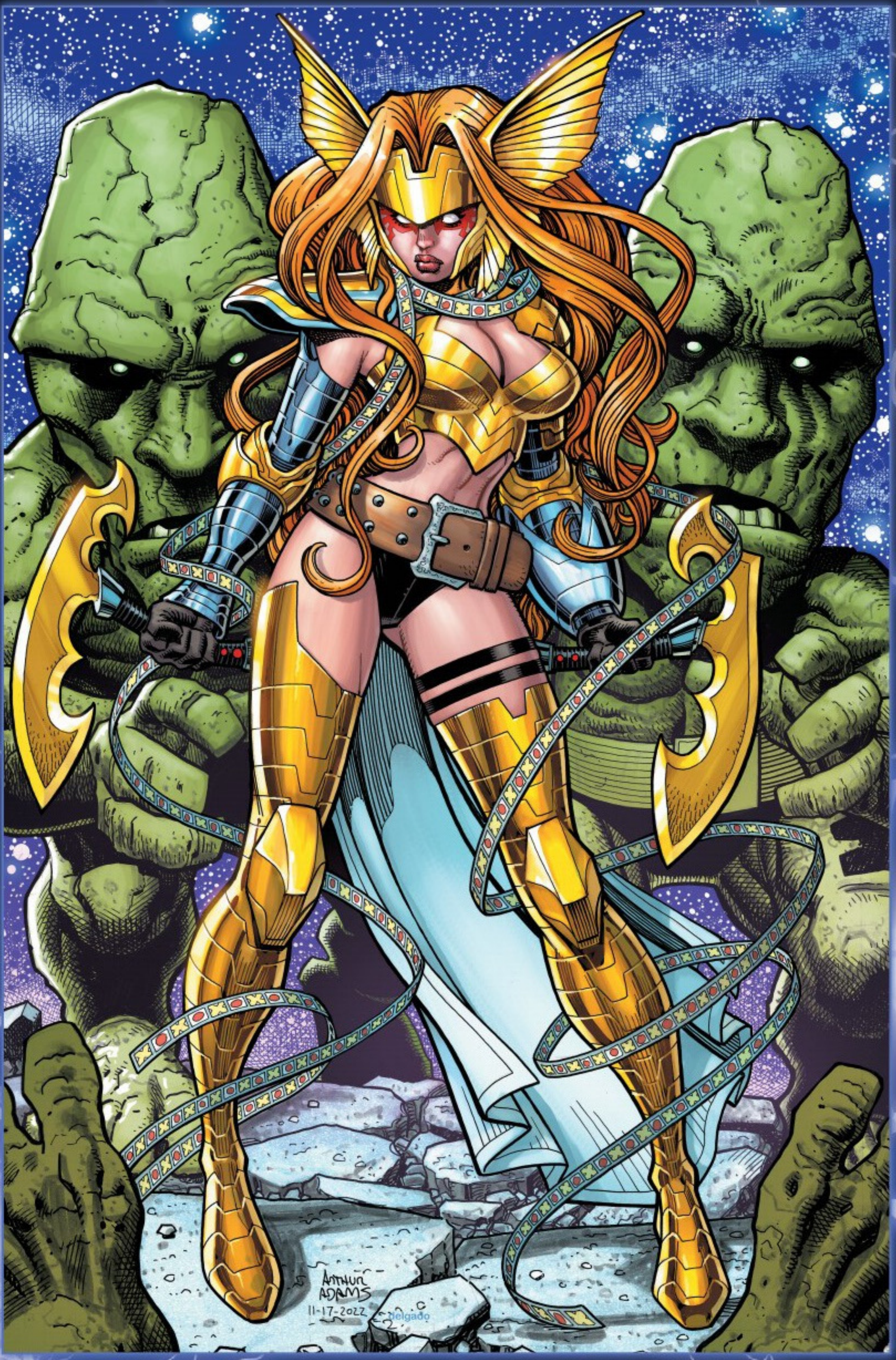
MANY THINGS COULD BE BETTER THAN THEY ARE. IN OTHER WORLDS, WHO KNOWS WHAT MAY BE?
BUT THIS IS THE WORLD WHERE YOU HAVE FRAMED ME ON MIDGARD, MY SECOND HOME, FOR MURDER MOST FOUL...
YOU MUST ADMIT THAT WAS VERY NEAT.
AND NOW... NOW I HOLD THE LEASH OF ROXXON, THY GREAT ENEMY.
'TIS A MONSTER WITH A MONSTROUS APPETITE-- ONE I FEAR I HAVE NOT THE HEART TO DENY.
WHO KNOWS WHICH FELLOW AVENGERS HAVE ALREADY CAUGHT ITS HUNGRY EYE...?
NONE THAT I CANNOT PLUCK IT OUT.
STILL, MAKING STRIFE FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY IS A THING I LOOK STERNLY UPON, OF LATE.
THIS VERY DAY, I BANISHED LOKI FOR SUCH MISCHIEF--AND THOUGH THAT DEED ALREADY TROUBLES ME, THE DEED IS DONE...
THEN BE CONSISTENT, ALL-FATHER. BANISH ME LIKEWISE.
OR IMPRISON ME AND END MY SCHEMES THAT WAY. WHYEVER WOULD YOU NOT?
WOULD THAT NOT BE JUST, THOR...?
WOULD IT BE?
WHY DID YOU HELP SKURGE, AMORA?

I KNOW WHY HE DID WHAT HE DID. HE DIED FOR ME, AND NOW HE FEARS THAT DEATH WAS IN VAIN.
HE HAS DONE ME GREAT WRONG... BUT ONLY BECAUSE HE WANTS TO SAVE ME, LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.
YOU SAY YOU DO NOT... AND I BELIEVE YOU...
...YET SKURGE'S ACTIONS FOLLOWED YOUR PLAN. SO WHY THAT PLAN?
YOU SAY YOU CARE FOR ME-- AND I DO BELIEVE THAT AS WELL.
BUT THERE ARE THOSE YOU CARE FOR MORE...
AND SO WE BEHOLD THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM.
BECAUSE OF ME, YOUR BELOVED MORTALS CALL YOU MURDERER. I USED SKALD-MAGIC TO MUDDY YOUR MIND AND YOUR MYTH. I SHOULD NOW BE IN IRONS.
AND YET YOU ARE SO WILLING TO FORGIVE AND FORGET THAT WE PRACTICALLY REKINDLE A ROMANCE.
WHAT DO YOU WISH FORGIVEN AND FORGOTTEN, THOR?
WHAT WRONG HAVE YOU DONE ME?
WILL YOU SAY IT FIRST, OR SHALL I?
...
IRIC.
YOUR SON.

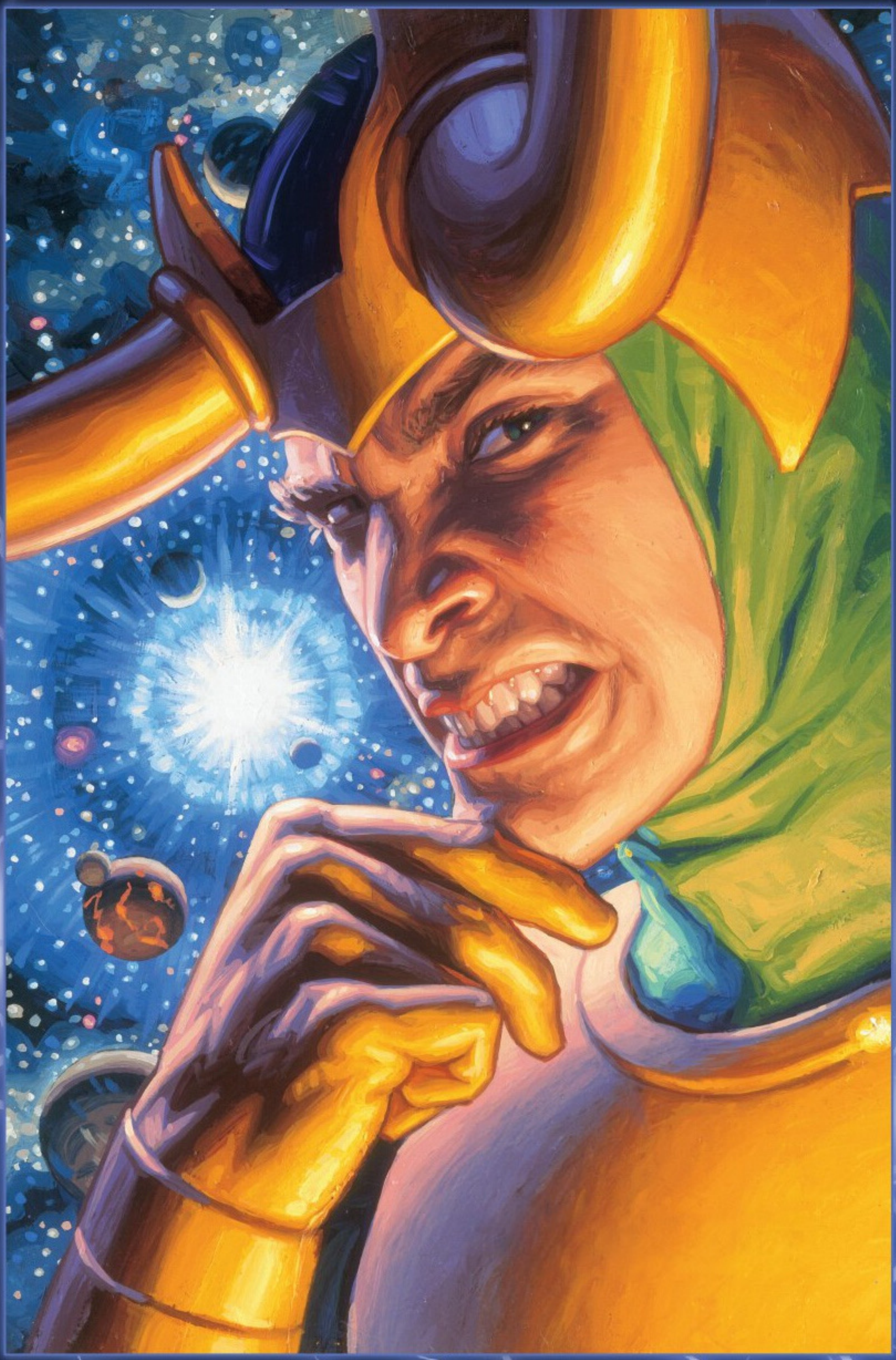
HE WAS OF ASGARD. HE WAS MY SUBJECT. AND WHEN HE FACED HIS END...HIS ALL-FATHER WAS NOT THERE.*
THERE ARE THOSE WHO WOULD DENY MY RESPONSIBILITY IN THAT. THOSE WHO DO NOT SEE A MEASURE OF BLOOD ON MY HANDS.
I AM NOT ONE OF THEM.
*Strange Academy: Finals tells the tale.
AND NOW MIDGARD SEES THE STAIN TOO--THOUGH I COULD SHOW THE MORTALS HOW MISTAKEN THEY ARE.
AS YOU COULD HELP ME RESTORE MY SON TO LIFE...
WOULD THAT I COULD, ENCHANTRESS. BUT EVEN BLACKMAIL CANNOT MAKE ME.
I WILL NOT DENY GOOD IRIC HIS JUST REWARD FOR A DEATH IN BATTLE. IF ANY HAVE EARNED VALHALLA, THY SON HAS...
SO I MUST DO MORE TO CONVINCE YOU?
DULY NOTED, THOR.
HAVE WE NOT ALREADY DONE ENOUGH TO ONE ANOTHER, AMORA?
CAN WE NOT LEAVE THINGS AS THEY STAND?
WOULD YOU, IF IT WAS YOUR CHILD? I WILL DO WHAT I MUST.
BUT I DO CARE FOR YOU, THOR. THIS WAS NEVER ABOUT REVENGE...
NOT FOR YOU OR I, PERHAPS. BUT... YOU SAY THAT YOU HOLD ROXXON'S LEASH YET WILL NOT CONTROL ITS HUNGER.
BE VERY SURE, THEN...

"...THAT ROXXON DOES NOT LOOK HUNGRILY UPON *THEE*."
PROCESS COMPLETE AT *0017 HOURS*. ONE CASUALTY.
REVIVING SUBJECT NOW.
VRRRR
DR. *LAMARR?*
DID IT *WORK*...?
THE *REPLACEMENT BODY* GESTATED WITHOUT A HITCH, SIR. ASIDE FROM THE UNPLEASANTNESS THE *ORIGINAL* ENDURED, IT'S AN EXACT MATCH.
THE *SUIT* IS A VAN DYNE ORIGINAL, TRANSLOCATED IN FROM *PARIS*.
AND THE *SOFTWARE* THAT GOES WITH THE HARDWARE? I'D RATHER NOT BE SOME GRUBBY *CLONE*...
YOU'RE *YOU*, SIR. THE *BLOOD SACRIFICE* WAS MADE AND ACCEPTED.
DESPITE *POLITICAL UPHEAVALS* IN THE INFERNAL REALMS, YOUR *CONTRACT* REMAINS AS AGREED-- *A SOUL FOR A SOUL.*
A SOUL FOR A SOUL--HOW *EGALITARIAN*. ALL SOULS ARE *EQUAL* IN THE EYES OF *HELL*...
...BUT HERE ON *EARTH*, SOME ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS. AND IN THAT SPIRIT, AN *EXAMPLE* SHOULD BE SET.
THE *GODS* KILLED *DARIO AGGER*. SO I THINK IT'S ONLY *FAIR*...

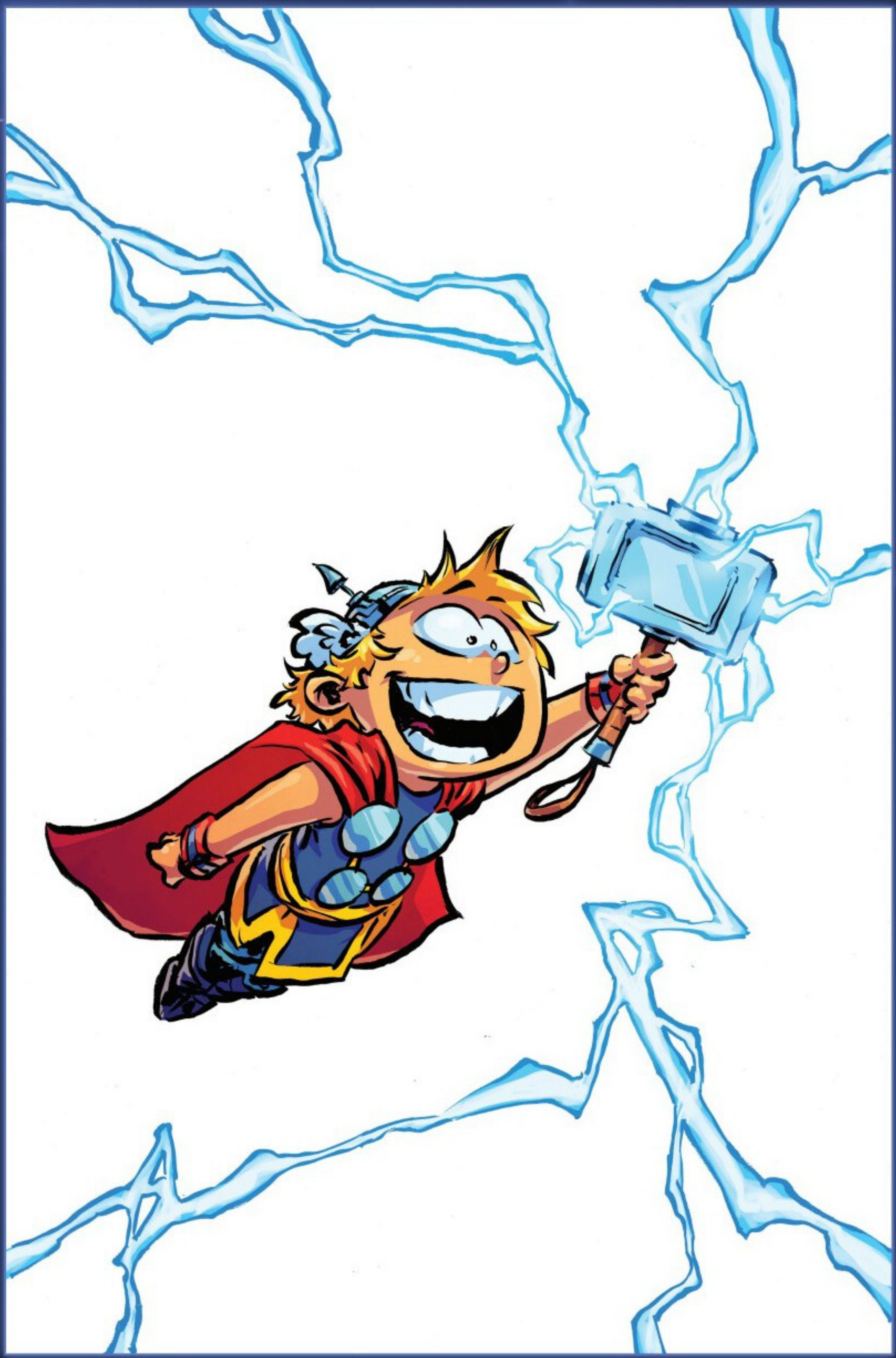
...THAT DARIO AGGER KILLS THE GODS.
DON'T YOU?
And so, the end began.
And Thor's doom was assured.
RETURN OF THE KING



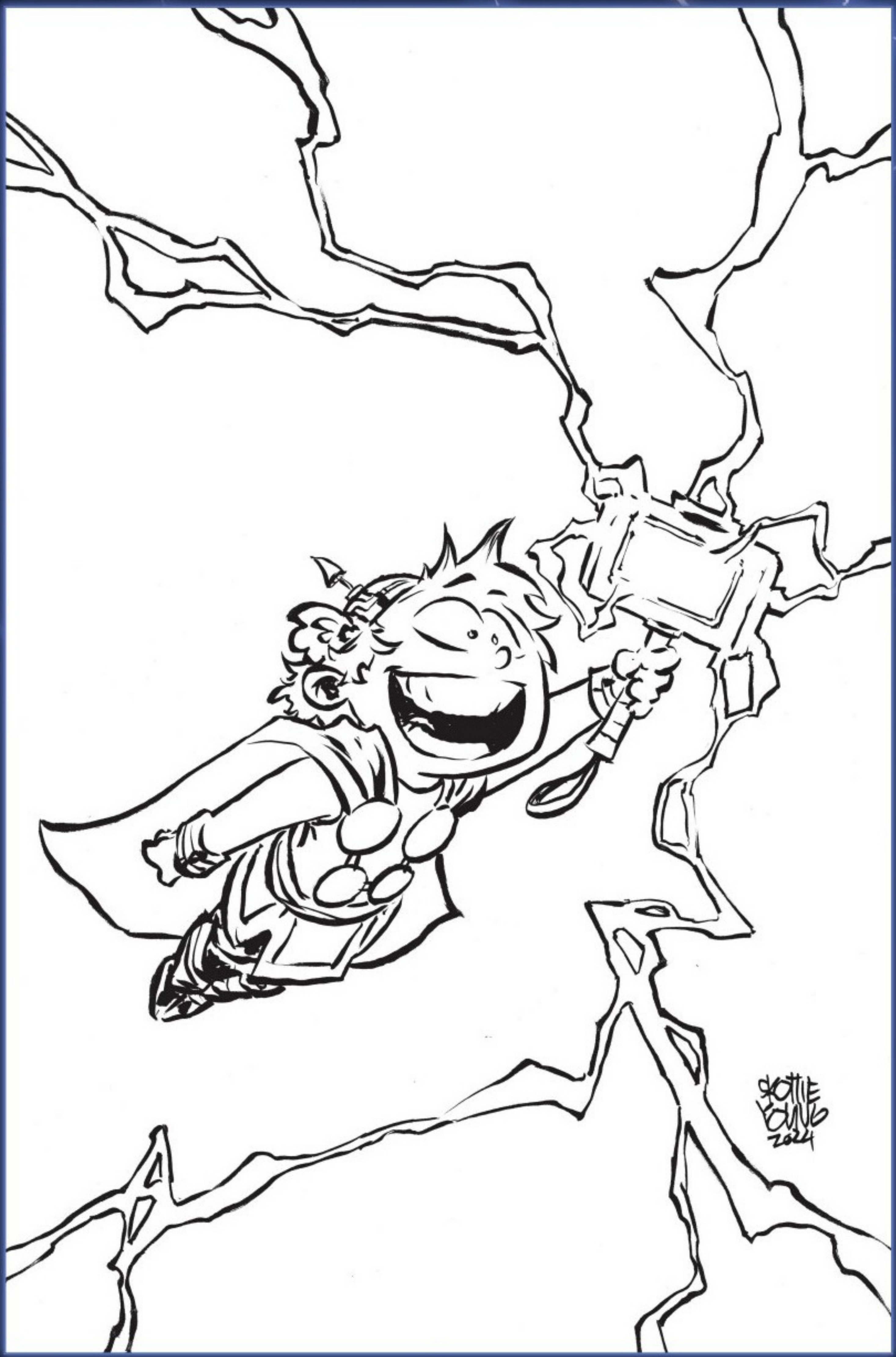
11 VARIANT BY **ARTHUR ADAMS**
& **EDGAR DELGADO**



11 MARVEL MASTERPIECES VARIANT BY
GREG & **TIM HILDEBRANDT**

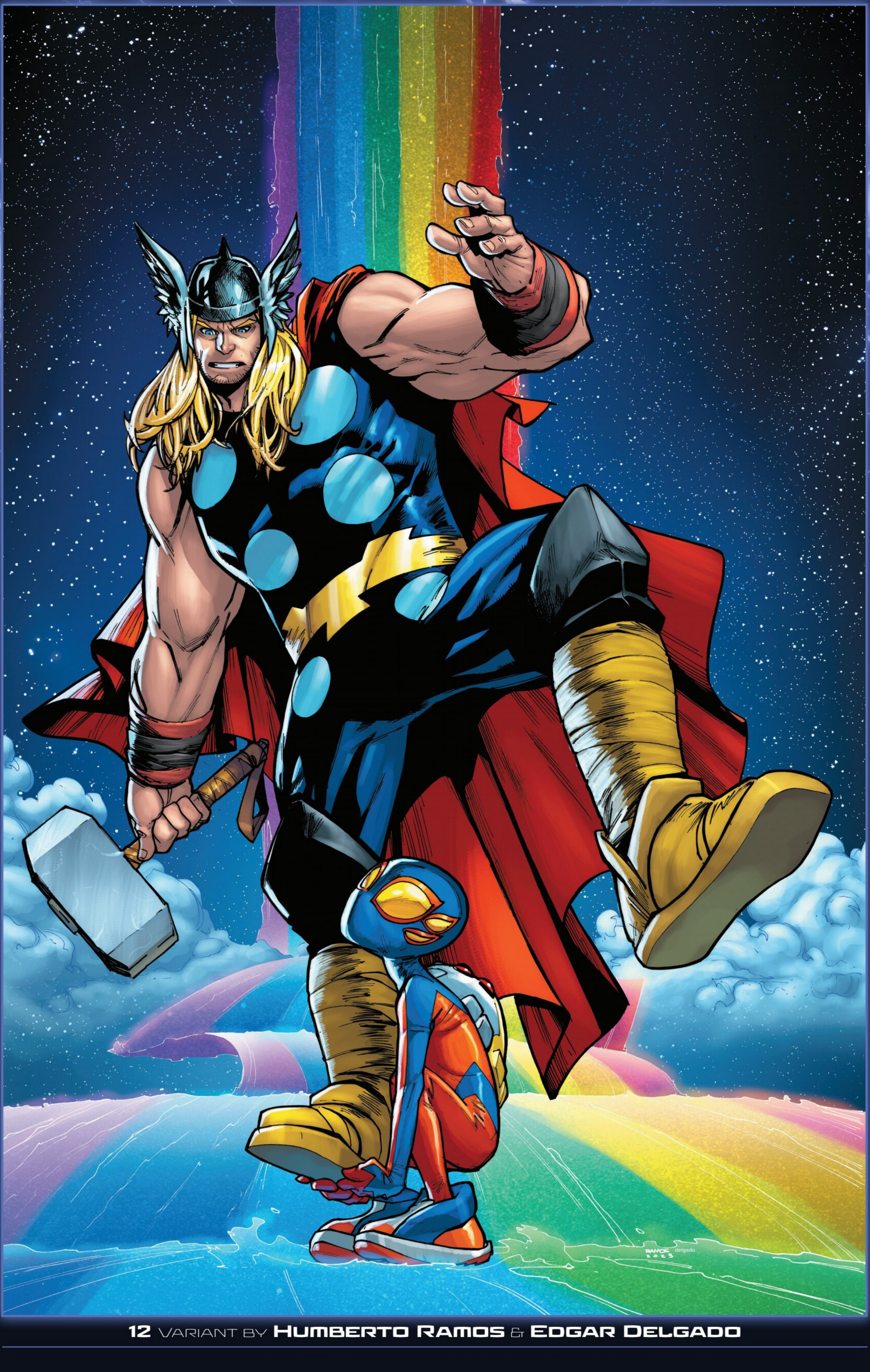


12 BIG MARVELS VARIANT BY
SKOTTIE YOUNG

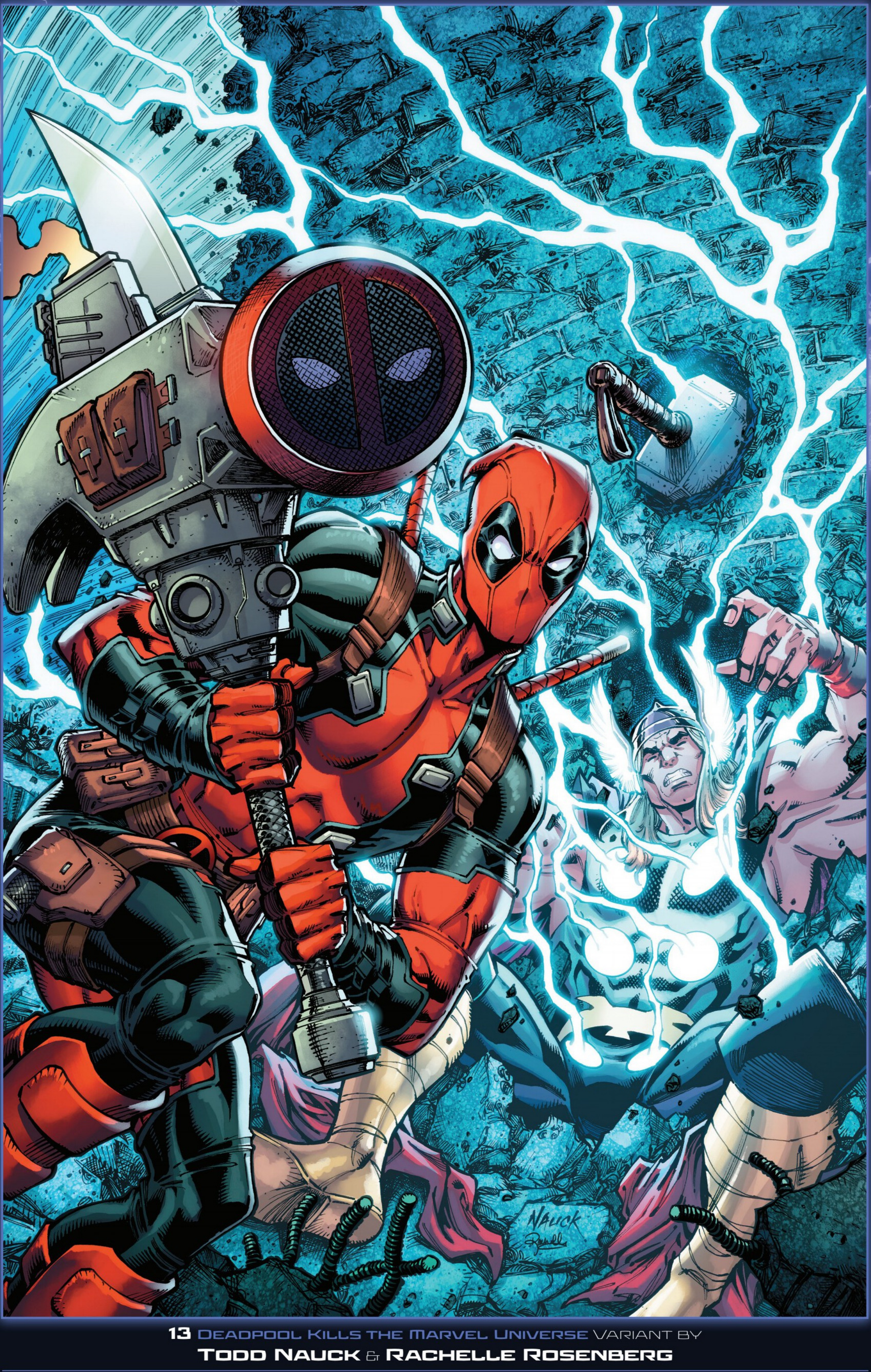


12 BIG MARVELS BLACK & WHITE VARIANT BY
SKOTTIE YOUNG

12 PRIDE ALLIES VARIANT BY **DAVI GO**

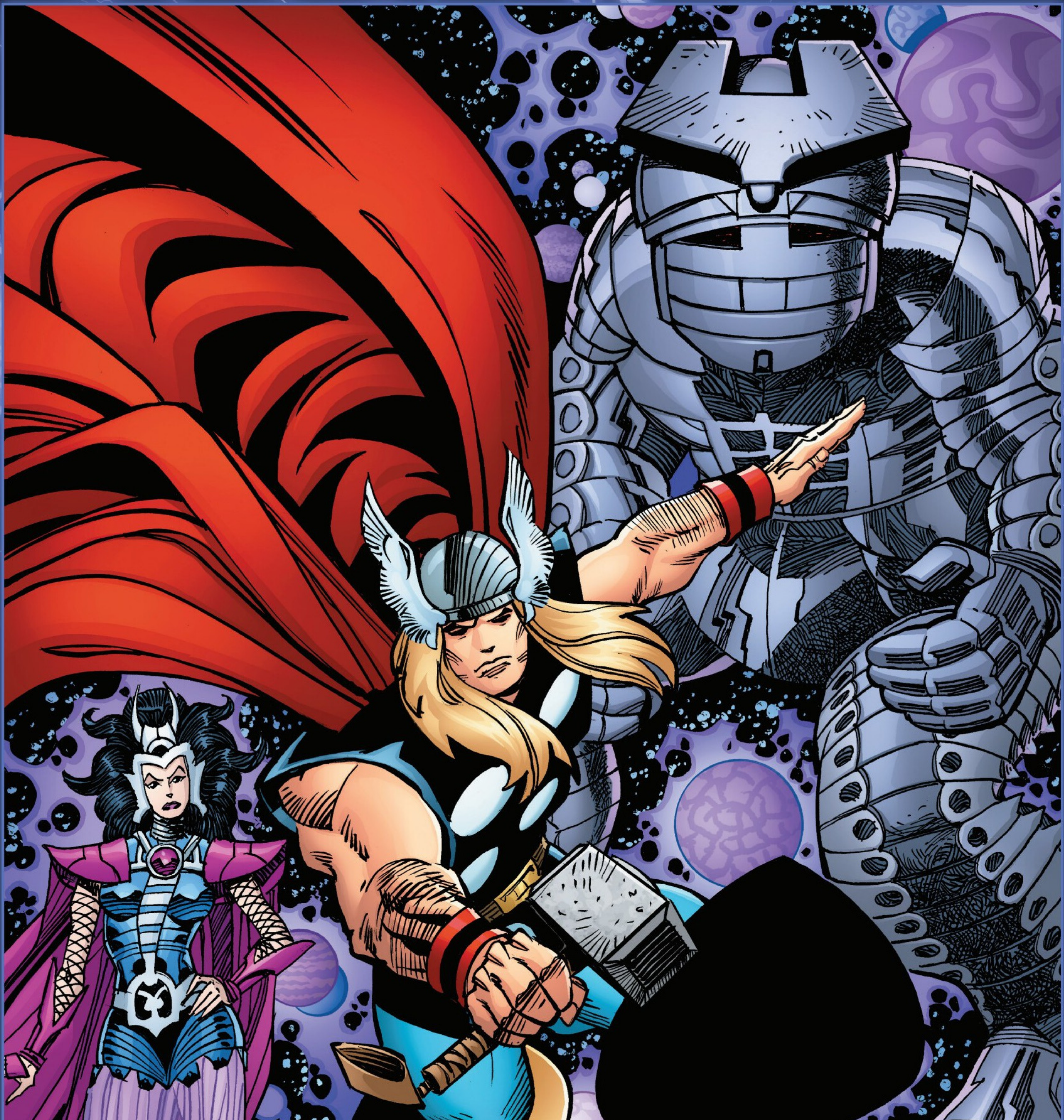


12 VARIANT BY **HUMBERTO RAMOS** & **EDGAR DELGADO**



13 Deadpool Kills the Marvel Universe Variant by

Todd Nauck & Rachelle Rosenberg



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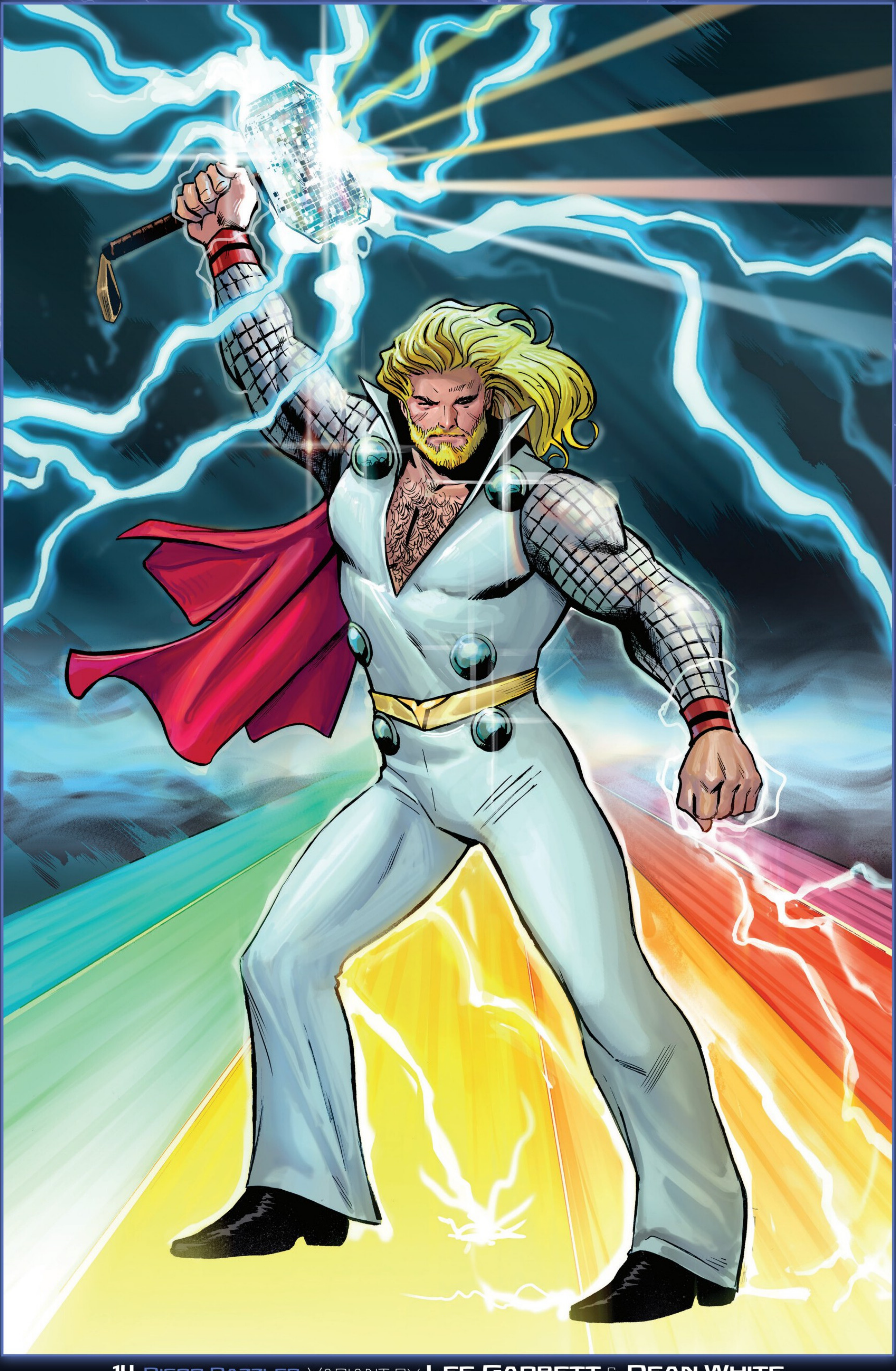

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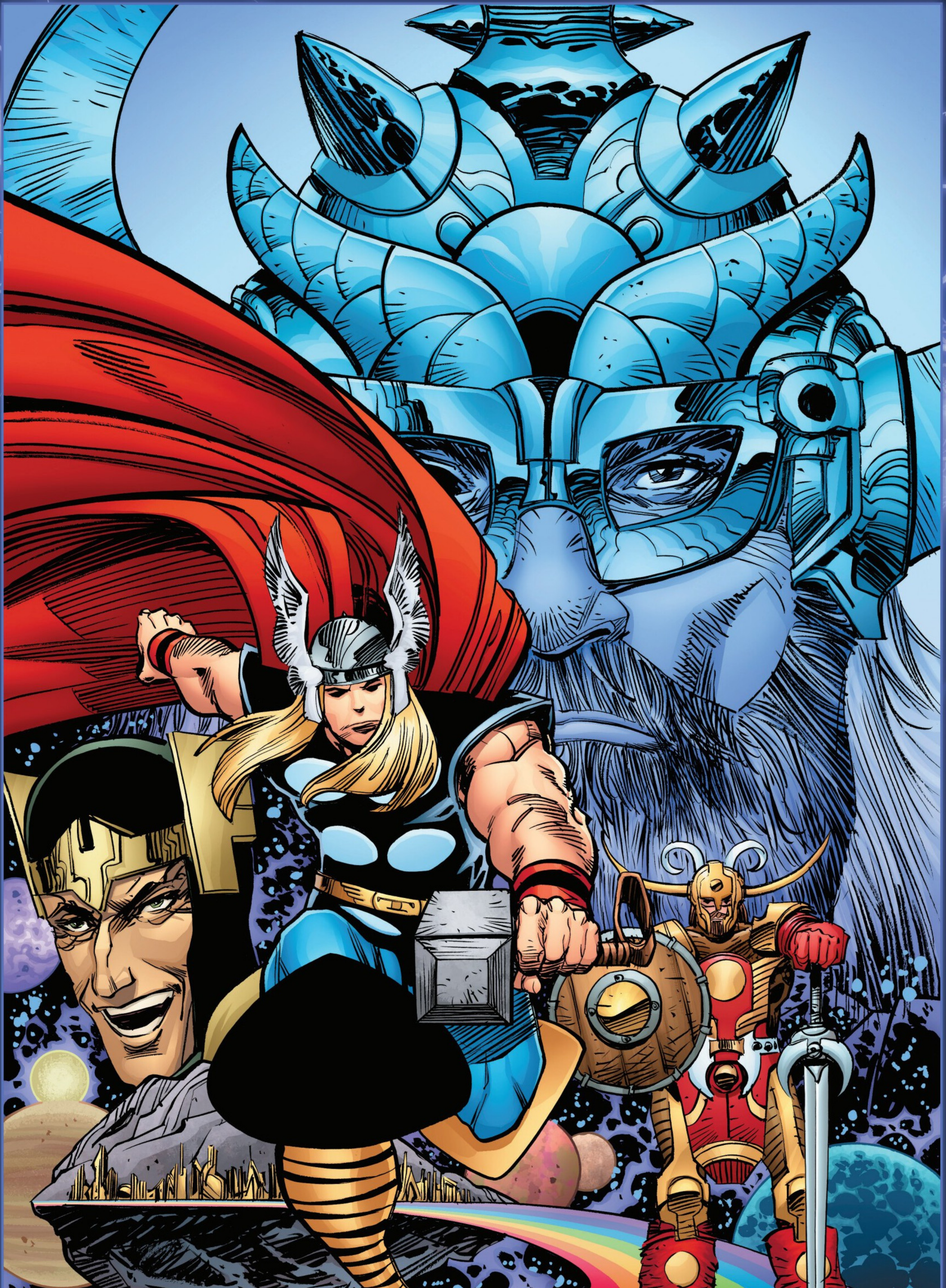

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